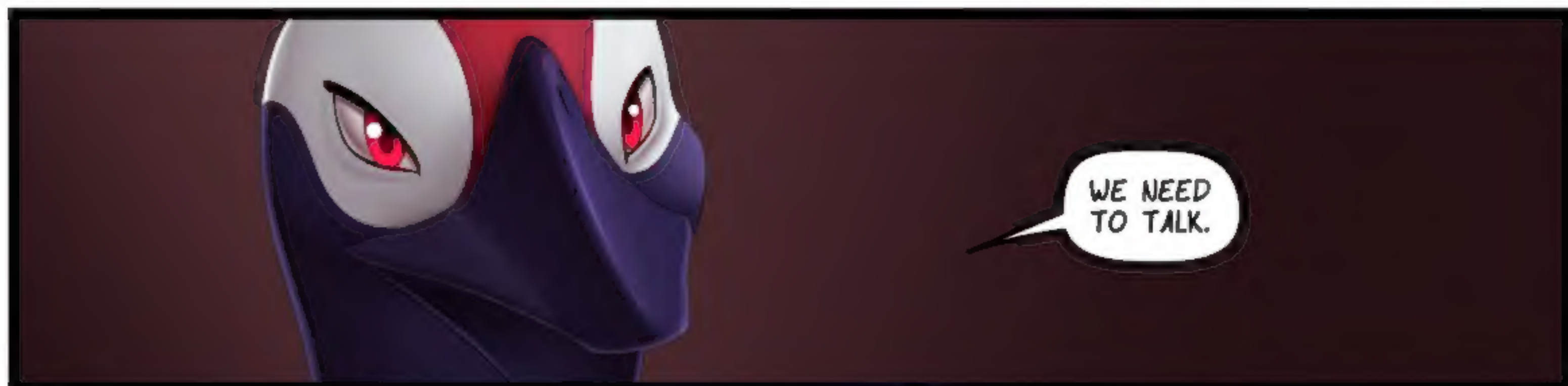
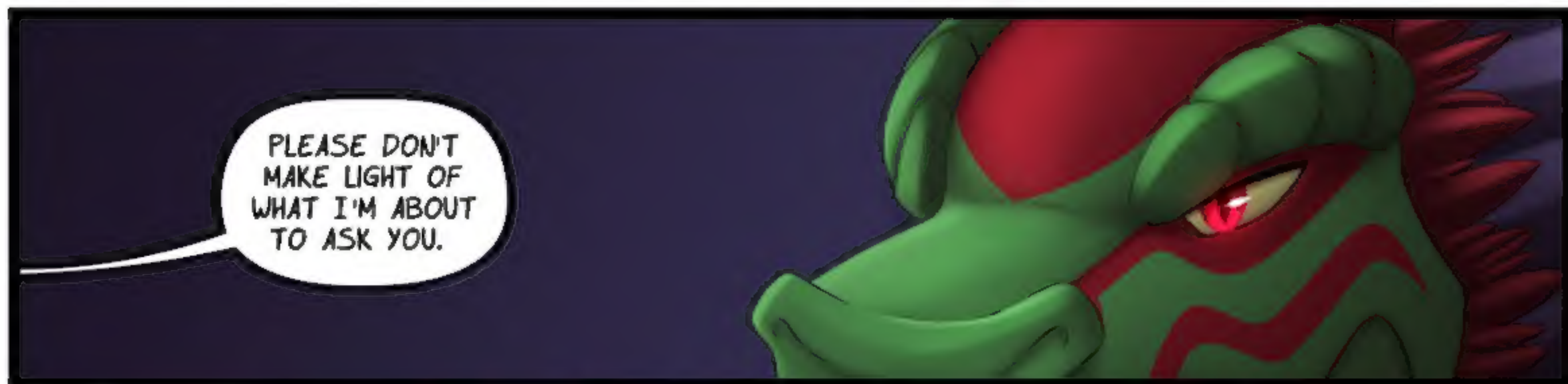






UNLESS IT IS
A MEDICAL CONCERN
REGARDING KHEILAFI,
IT WILL HAVE
TO WAIT.

THIS INVESTIGATION
INTO A POTENTIAL SECURITY
BREACH TAKES PRECE--

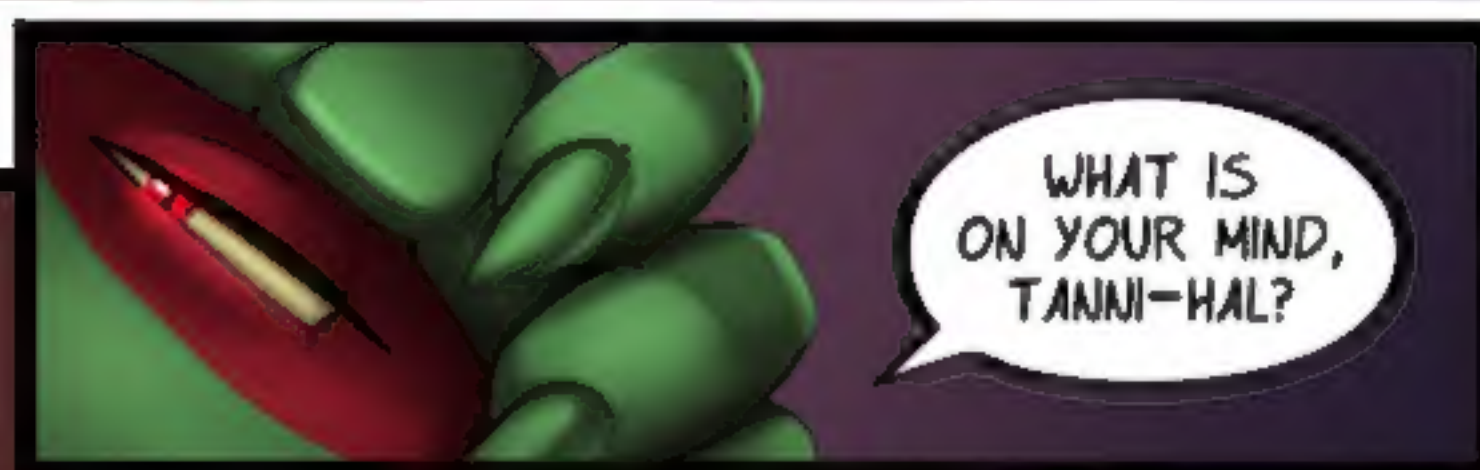
KRAON!

UNTIL THE CHIEF
REPORTS BACK WITH NEW
INFORMATION, YOU HAVE
TIME TO TALK.



AGH...

VERY WELL.



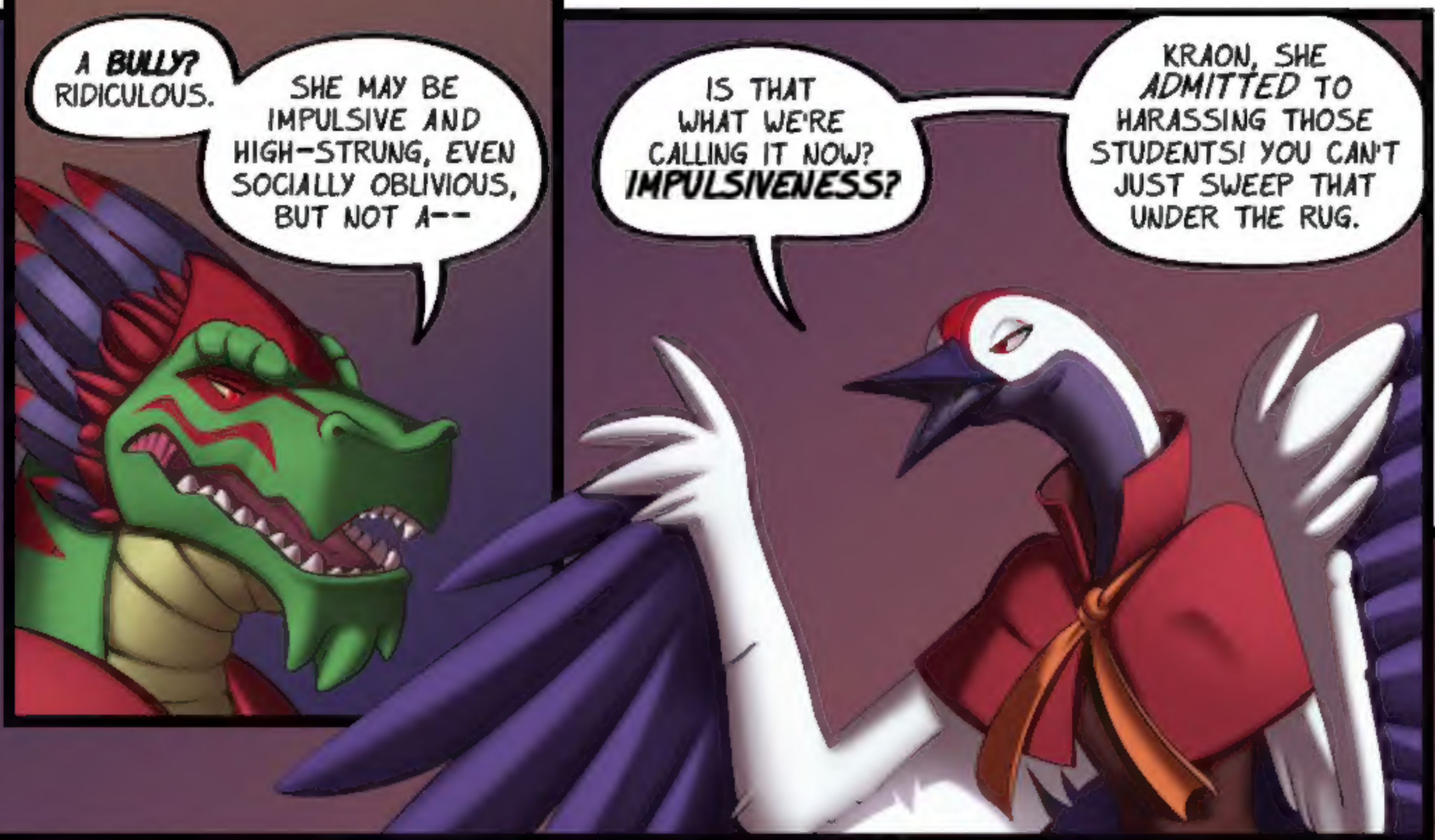
WHAT IS
ON YOUR MIND,
TANNI-HAL?

YOUR
DAUGHTER.

AND THE WAY
YOU'RE SO CARELESSLY
DAMAGING HER WITH THIS...
THIS **ICE KING** ACT
OF YOURS.



WERE YOU
AWARE? KHEIL
IS BECOMING
A BULLY.



A **BULLY**?
RIDICULOUS.

SHE MAY BE
IMPULSIVE AND
HIGH-STRUNG, EVEN
SOCIALY OBLIVIOUS,
BUT NOT A--

IS THAT
WHAT WE'RE
CALLING IT NOW?
IMPULSIVENESS?

KRAON, SHE
ADMITTED TO
HARASSING THOSE
STUDENTS! YOU CAN'T
JUST SWEEP THAT
UNDER THE RUG.



I AM NOT
"RUG-SWEEPING"
ANYTHING.

IT WAS
CERTAINLY NOT
HER JOB TO DISCUSS
THEIR ATTENDANCE WITH
THEM, I AGREE.

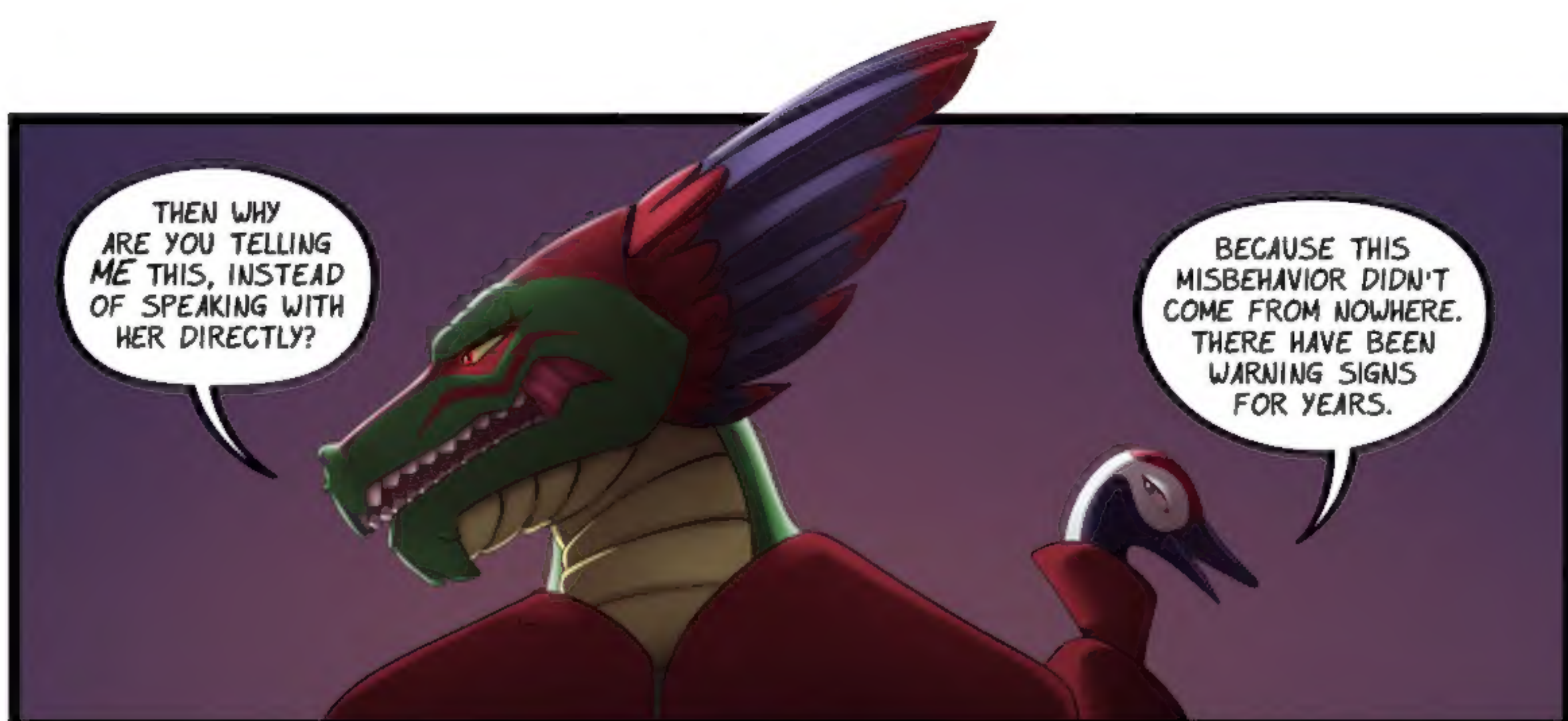
BUT IS IT
ANY DIFFERENT
FROM SENDING A
HALL MONITOR TO
SCOLD THEM?

YES! MY
COUNSELORS
THINK SO.

AT LEAST
TWO OF THOSE
STUDENTS CAME TO
US EARLIER TODAY.

ACCORDING
TO THEM, KHEIL
STOMPED ALL OVER
THEIR PERSONAL
BOUNDARIES AND
THREATENED THEM
WITH PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE.

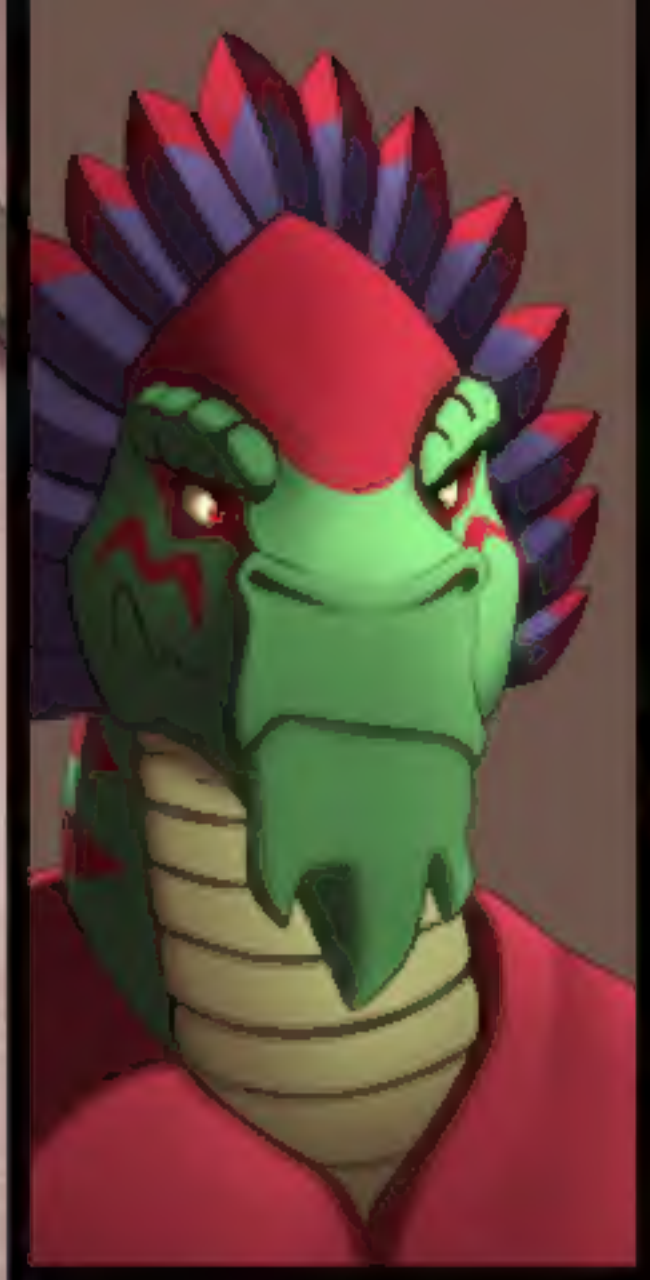
THEY FELT
UNSAFE, KRAON.
IN **YOUR** SCHOOL.
BECAUSE OF **YOUR**
DAUGHTER.





YOU TELL ME, KRAON. DOES PUBLICLY ANNOUNCING HER FAILURE TO PASS A CLASS COUNT AS "TOO HARSH?"

FOR THREE YEARS IN A ROW?



IT HAD TO BE DONE, TANNI-HAL.

SHE... HAS MUCH TO LEARN. I CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE LET HER ADVANCE--

FOCUS. THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOUR MOTIVES.

SHE STAYS UP ALL NIGHT STUDYING. SHE *INJURES* HALF HER SPARRING PARTNERS. SHE COMES TO ME *IN TEARS* WHEN HER GRADES ARE LESS THAN PERFECT.

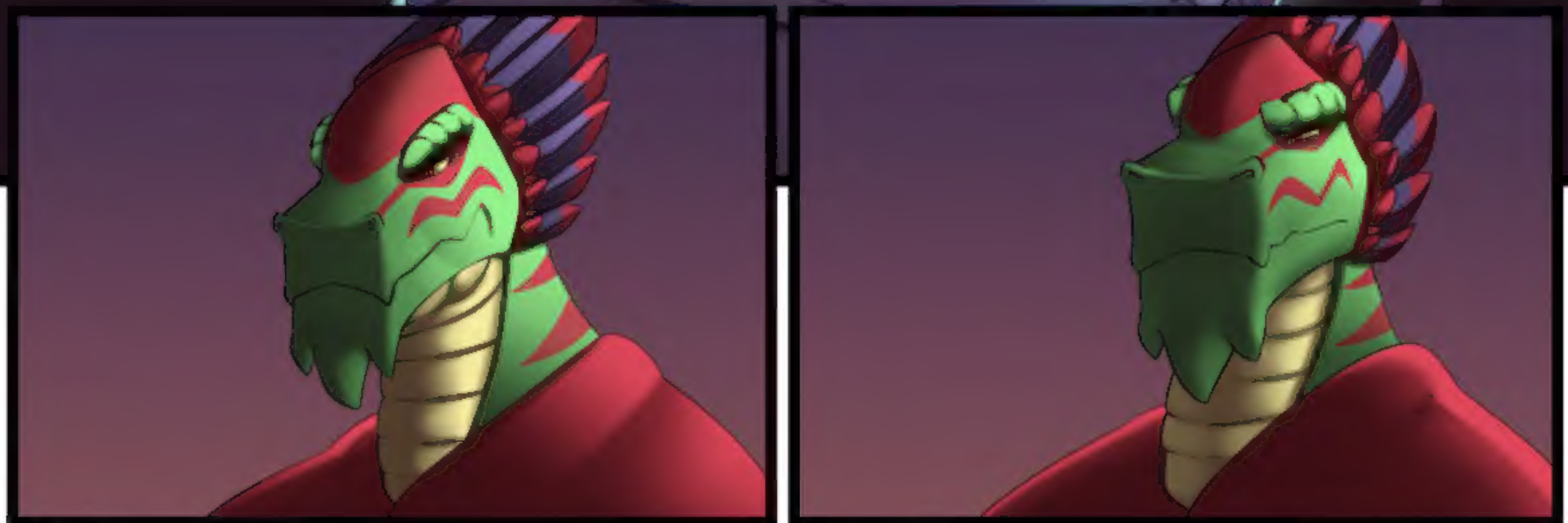
SHE HAS A TOTAL OF **TWO FRIENDS**, BOTH OF WHOM HAVE ISSUES OF THEIR OWN.

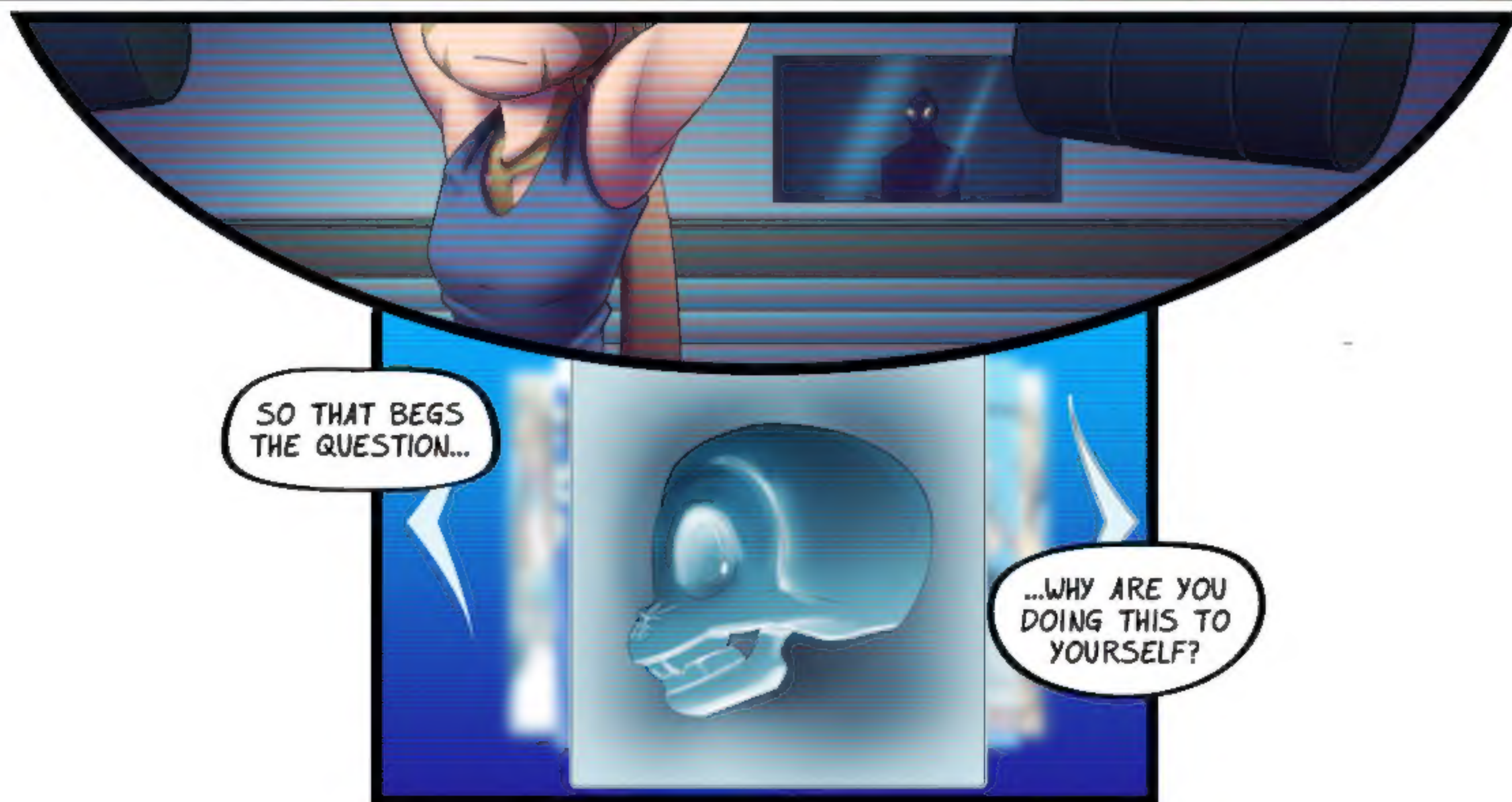
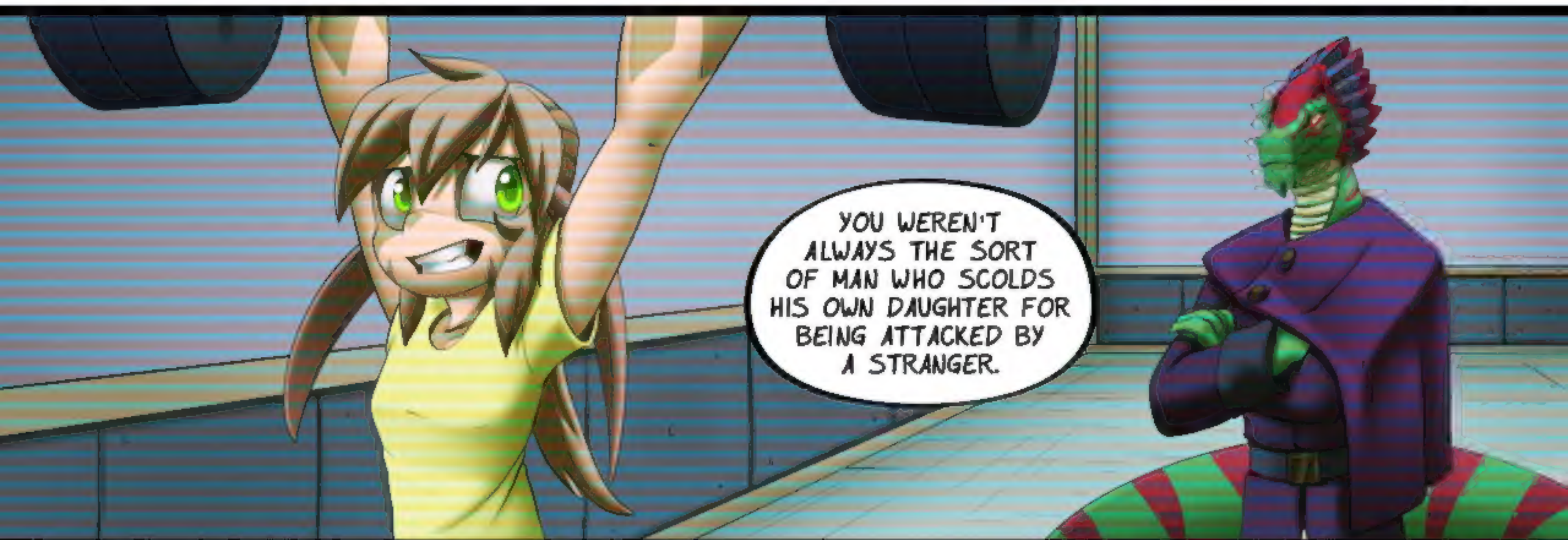
WHAT MORE PROOF OF DAMAGE DO YOU NEED?

SHOULD I HAVE HER **CORTISOL LEVELS** TESTED?

ENOUGH, YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.

NO, I HAVEN'T. MY POINT IS **THIS:**





YOU MAY BE ONE OF THE MOST CAPABLE LEADERS I'VE EVER WORKED WITH, BUT RAISING A LITTLE GIRL ISN'T THE SAME THING AS RAISING AN *INTERNATIONAL REBELLION*.

AND WHEN IT COMES TO FAMILY MATTERS... I'M SORRY, BUT LOOK AT YOUR TRACK RECORD. ASK YOUR SON.

THIS IS *NOT* YOUR STRONG SUIT.

I'M SURE IT'S DIFFICULT TO SINGLE-HANDEDLY KEEP HALF THE WORLD RUNNING *AND* BE A GOOD FATHER -- BUT REMEMBER, YOU CHOSE *HER*, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

I MAY NOT BE HER MOTHER, ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE, BUT AS A STUDENT OF THIS ACADEMY, SHE IS ONE OF MY CHARGES.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND-- I VALUE OUR FRIENDSHIP, BUT I NEED TO STEP IN NOW, WHILE THIS IS STILL FIXABLE.

IF YOU'D JUST *LET ME HELP YOU--*

TANNI-HAL, LISTEN TO ME.



I DO NOT
NEED **HELP**.

NOR DO I LACK
EMOTIONAL CONTROL,
AS YOU ACCUSE.

MY METHODS OF
HANDLING KHEILAFI
ARE A CALCULATED
DECISION, AND SHE IS
ALREADY REAPING
ITS BENEFITS.

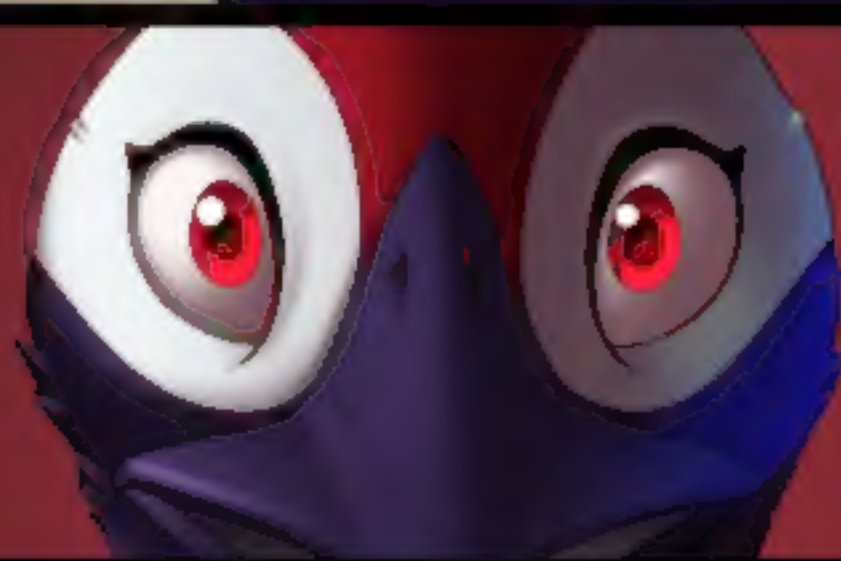
YOU'VE SEEN
HER USE KHEN-RHO
WITHOUT RINGS.



KRAON, WHAT
COULD KHEIL'S ABILITIES
POSSIBLY HAVE TO DO
WITH YOUR NONEXISTENT
PARENTING SKILLS?

EVERYTHING.

DO YOU REMEMBER
PROJECT SUPERCCELL?





SUPERCELL...

...THAT RING-ENGINE
IN THE TOWER ABOVE
YOUR OFFICE?

YES.



YOU SAID IT WAS
A GENERATOR.



IT IS,
IN A WAY.

NOW DO YOU
UNDERSTAND WHY I
CAN ANSWER NO
FURTHER QUESTIONS
ABOUT THIS?



WHAT DO YOUR
DAUGHTER'S ABILITIES
HAVE TO DO WITH PROJECT
SUPERCELL, AND **WHY** DOES
IT REQUIRE THAT YOU
MISTREAT HER?



THAT INFORMATION
IS CLASSIFIED.

...I AM
SORRY.



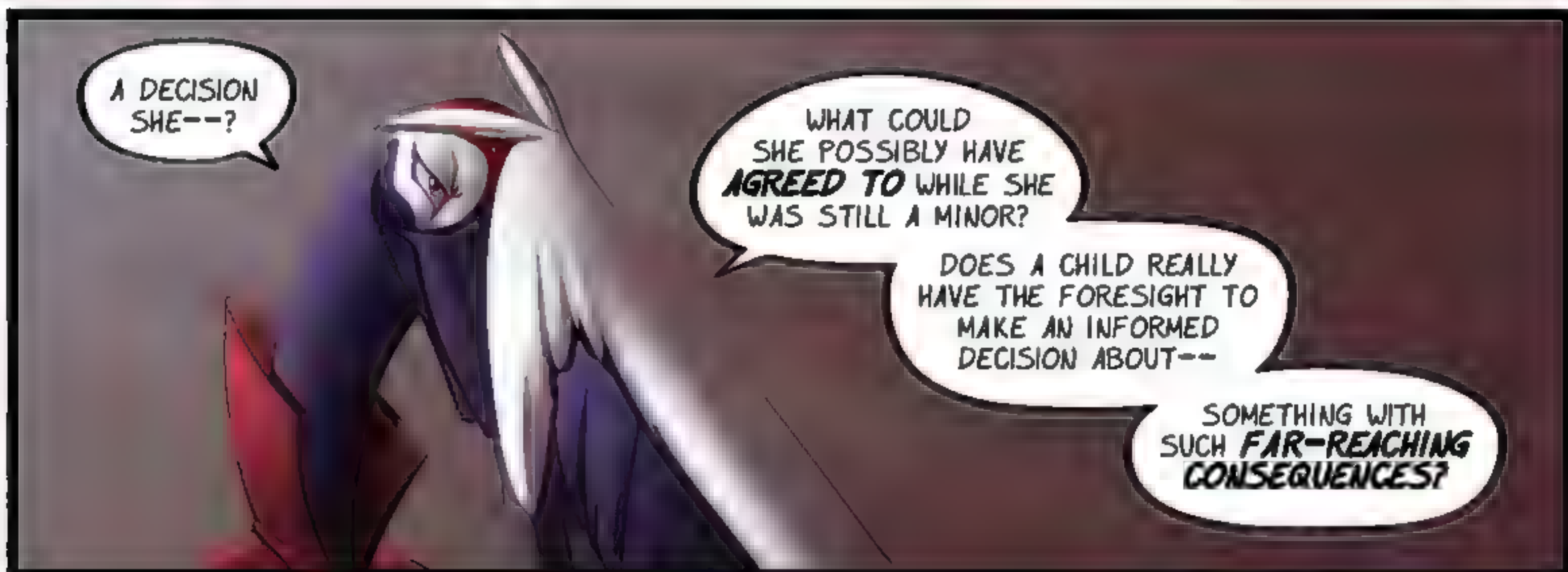
BUT I PROMISE
YOU, THERE **IS**
A REASON.



I UNDERSTAND
THAT THE SITUATION
MUST BE DIFFICULT FOR
YOU TO ACCEPT, DR. SARAN.
BUT THIS IS A DECISION
THAT KHEILAFI HERSELF
MADE LONG AGO.



I MUST
ASK THAT YOU
RESPECT IT.



A DECISION
SHE--?

WHAT COULD
SHE POSSIBLY HAVE
AGREED TO WHILE SHE
WAS STILL A MINOR?

DOES A CHILD REALLY
HAVE THE FORESIGHT TO
MAKE AN INFORMED
DECISION ABOUT--

SOMETHING WITH
SUCH **FAR-REACHING**
CONSEQUENCES?



...AND I
ASK THAT YOU
TRUST ME.



AND BESIDES,
IF IT'S TRUE THAT
SHE ENCOUNTERED AN
ATTACKER TONIGHT...

WELL, FIRST I
COUNT MYSELF LUCKY
THAT SHE CAME BACK
TO US AT ALL, AND WITH
ONLY MINOR INJURIES
AT THAT.

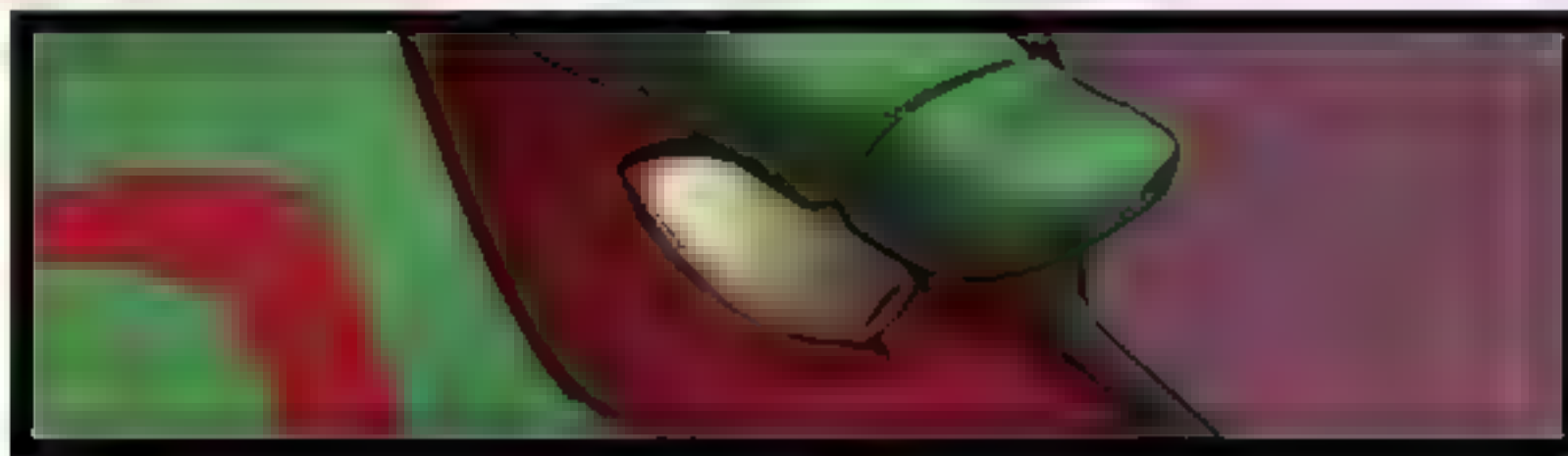
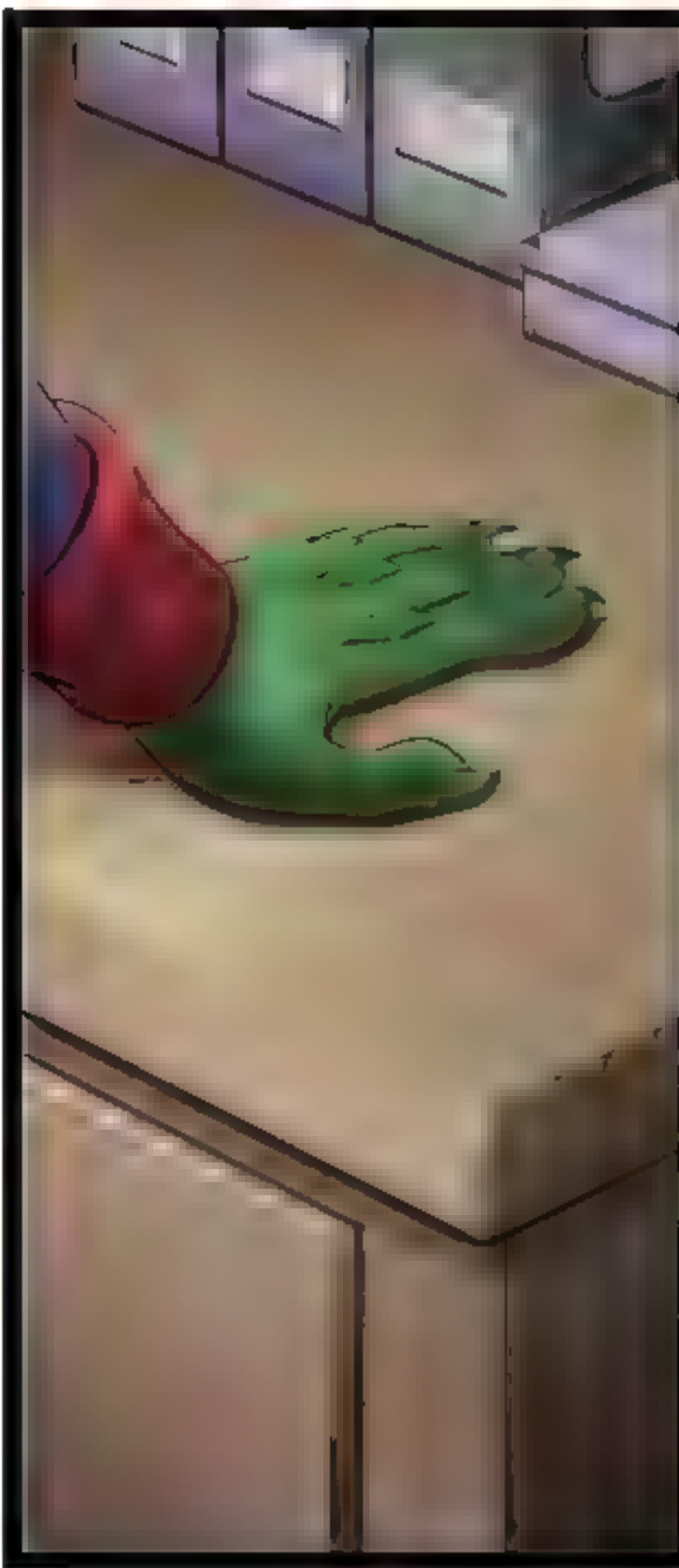
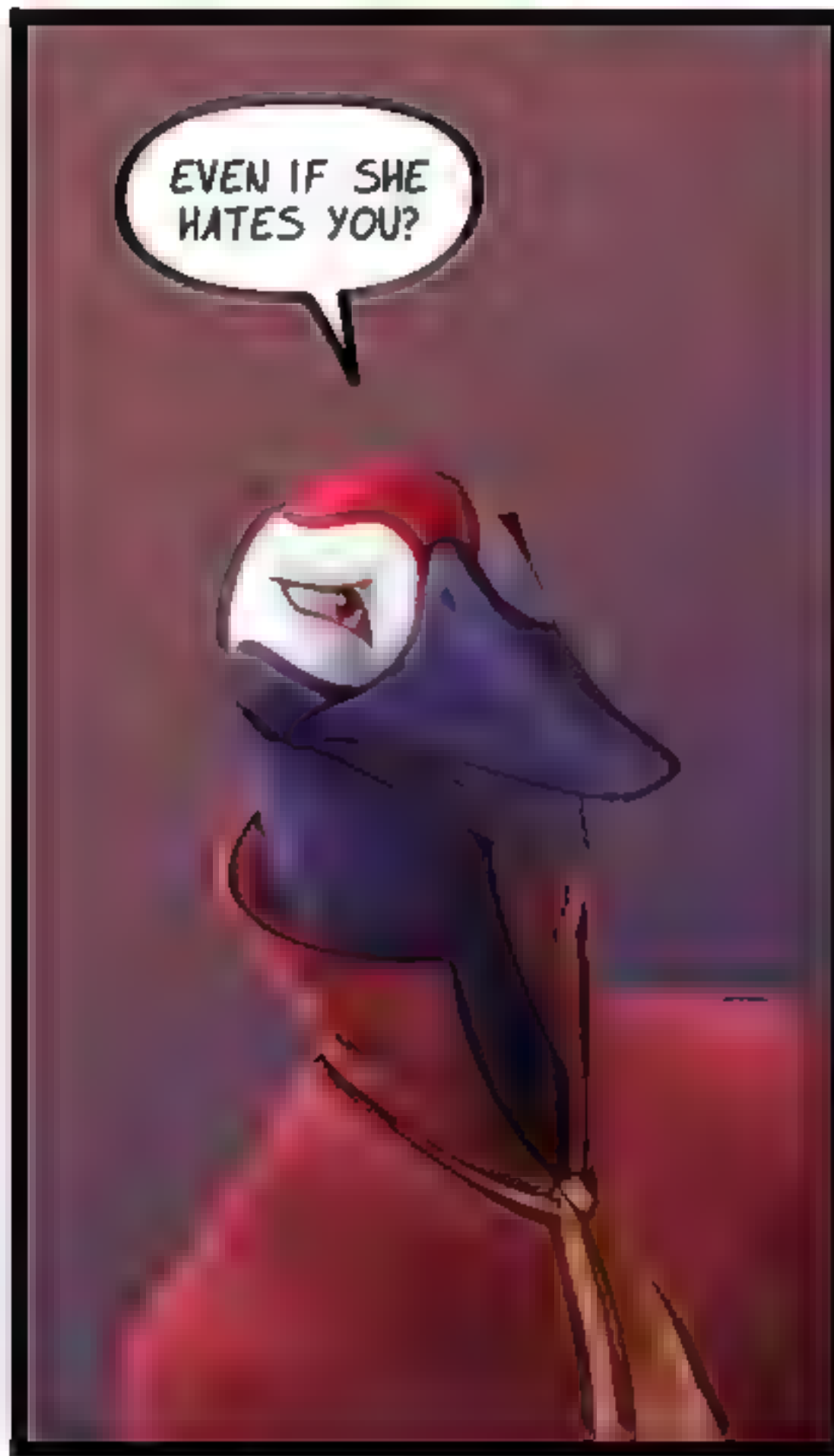
BUT SECONDLY,
IT MEANS THAT SHE
ONLY SURVIVED **BECAUSE**
OF THAT UNIQUE ABILITY.

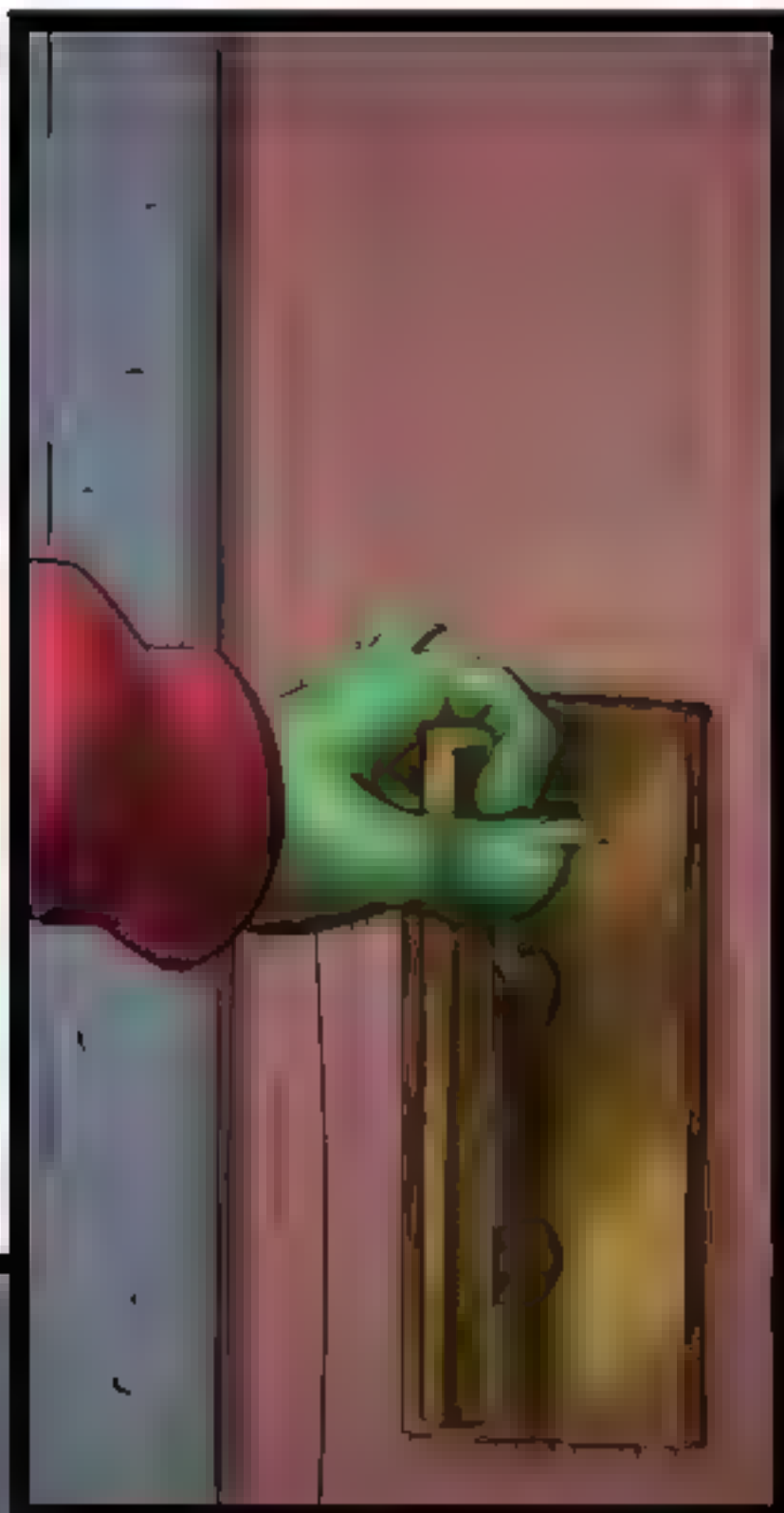
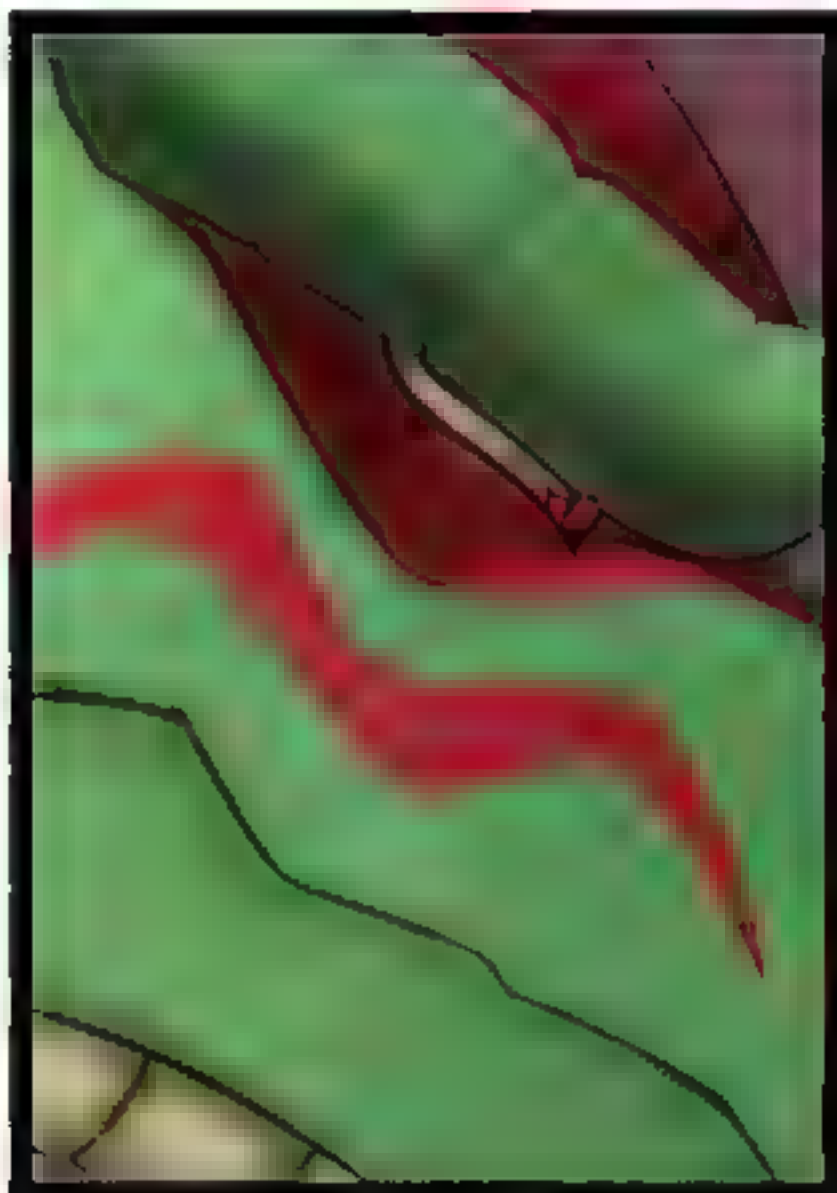


HAVING A BETTER
GUN DOESN'T GUARANTEE
YOUR SURVIVAL, AND
YOU KNOW IT.



SHE GOT **LUCKY**
THIS TIME, AND YOU'D
BETTER NOT CONVINCE
YOURSELF OTHERWISE.





...THE POINT
WAS TO **KEEP** HER
FROM HARM, NOT
CAUSE IT.

VERY WELL.
IF YOU FIND A
WAY TO INTERVENE
ON KHEILAFI'S
BEHALF--

IN A WAY THAT DOES
NOT INVOLVE INTERFERING
WITH HER DECISION TO BE
PART OF THIS PROJECT--



THEN BY ALL
MEANS, DO WHAT YOU
MUST TO PREVENT HER
FROM DEVELOPING NEW...
BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS.

I WILL ENSURE
THAT YOU HAVE ACCESS
TO ANY RESOURCES
YOU REQUIRE.

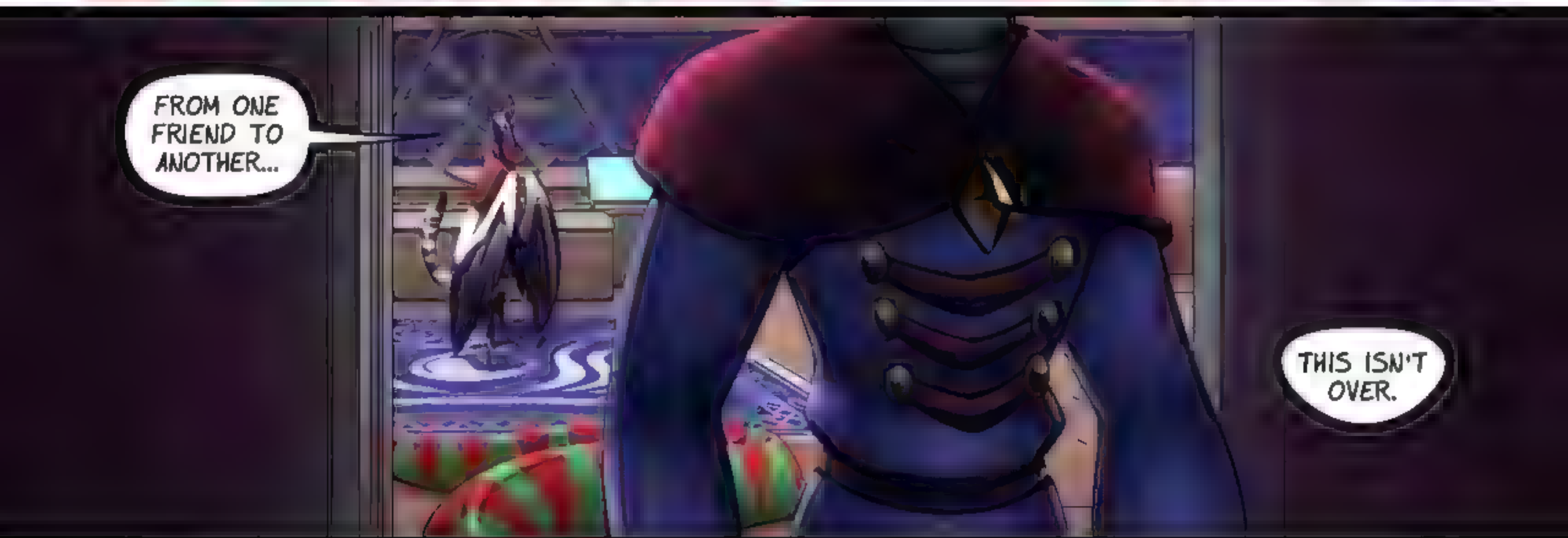
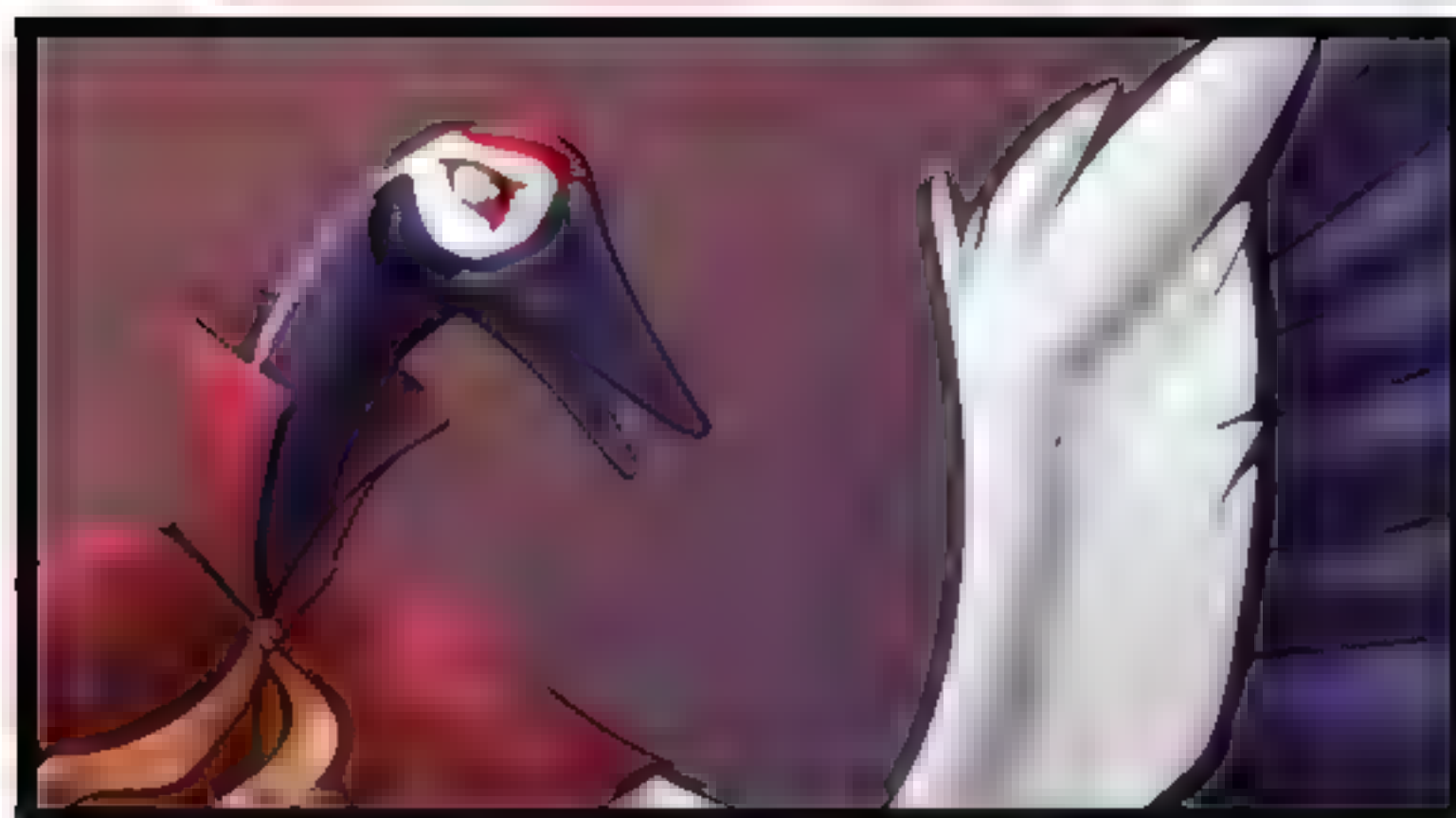
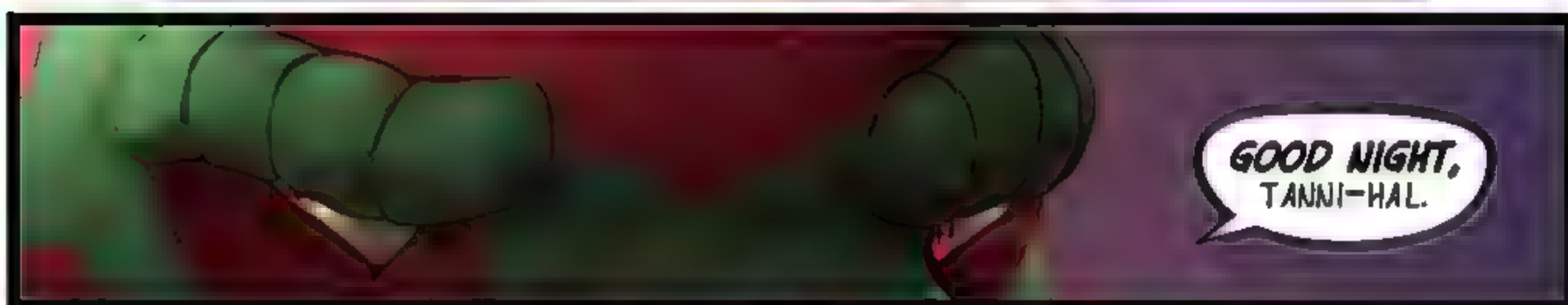


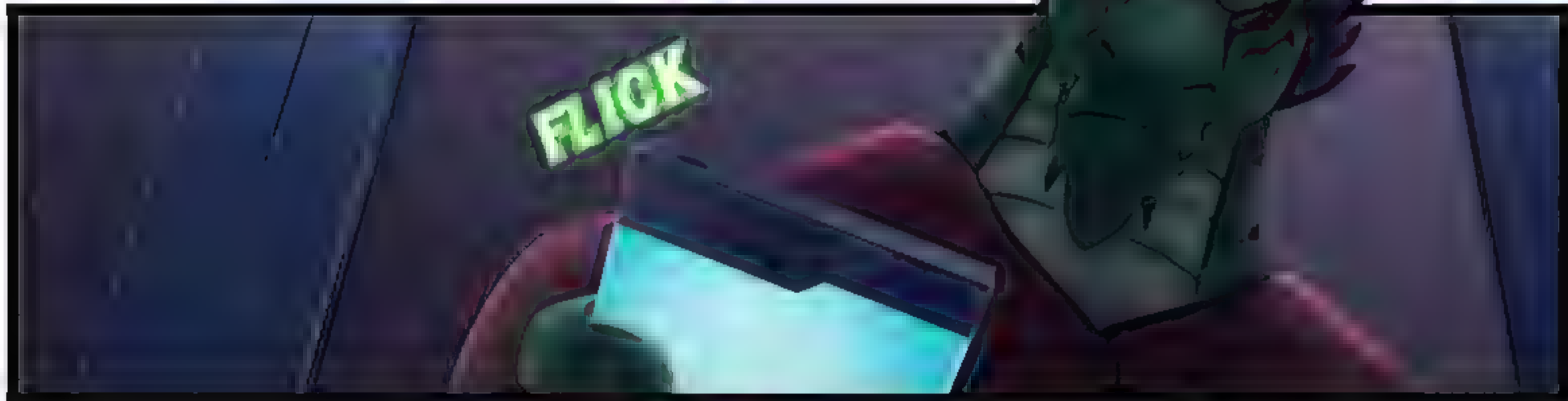
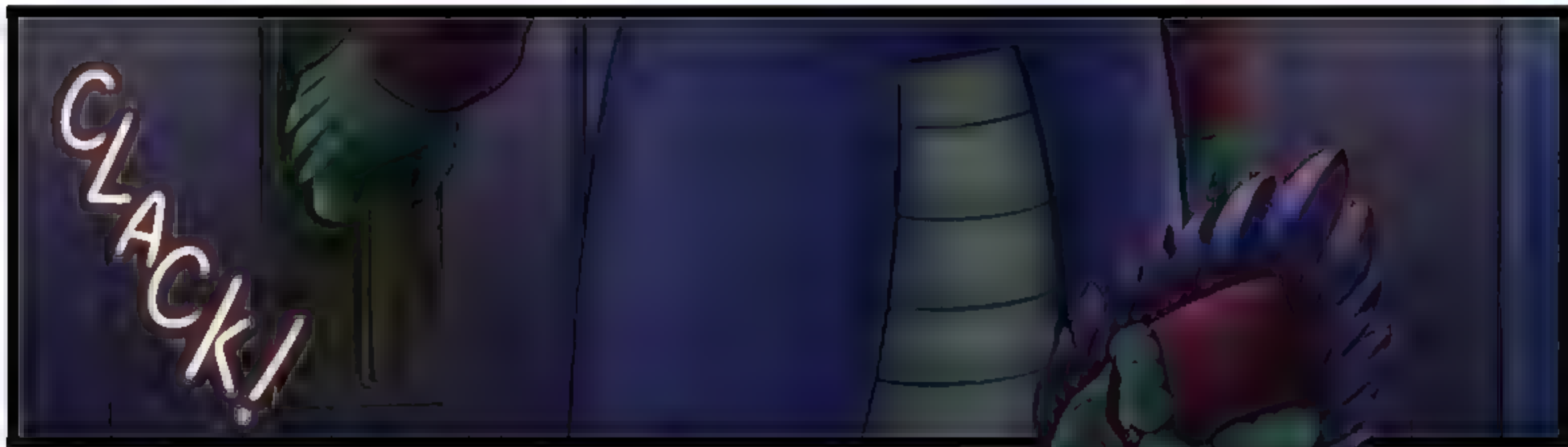
CALL IT OFF,
KRAON.

PLEASE.



KILL THE PROJECT,
CUT YOUR LOSSES,
AND FIX THIS.





THE NEXT
MORNING...

WHAT ABOUT
HER CAREER
RECORD?

OR A LIST OF
MISSIONS? OR AN
ARREST ROSTER?

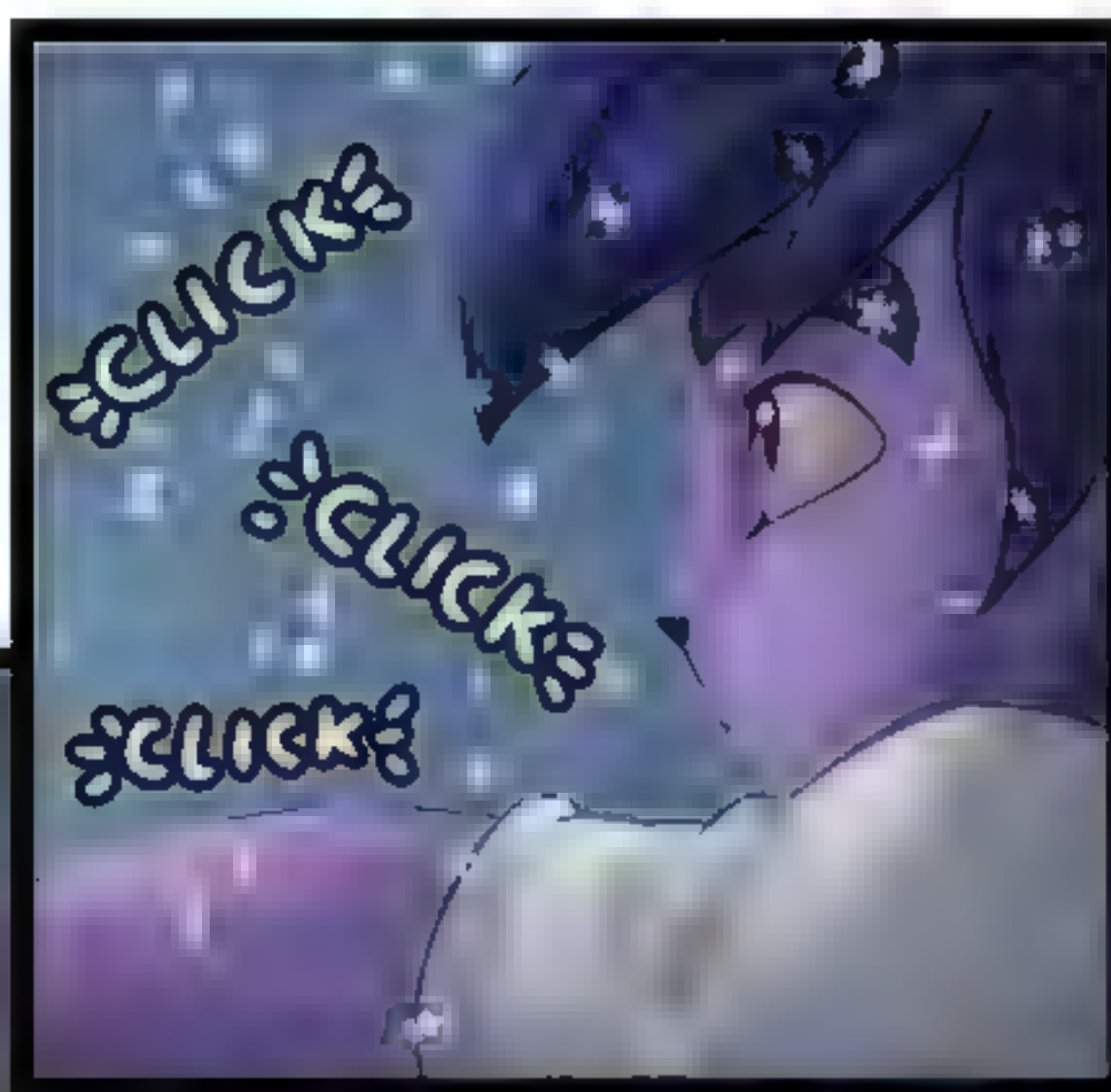
OR... I DON'T
KNOW, I'LL TAKE AN
ENLISTMENT DATE
AT THIS POINT.

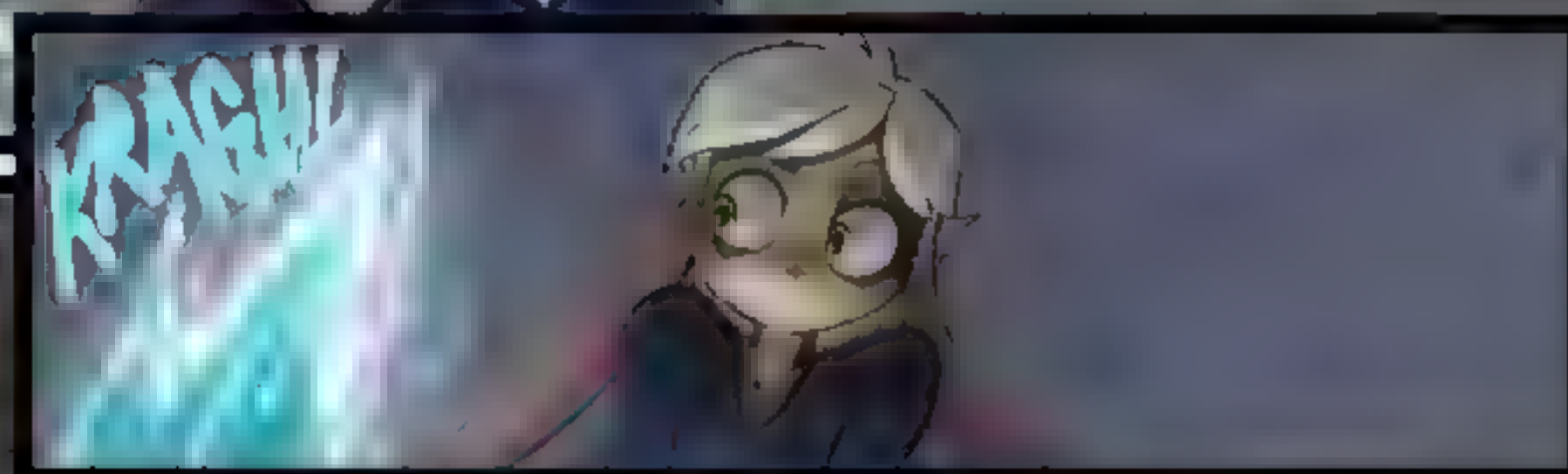
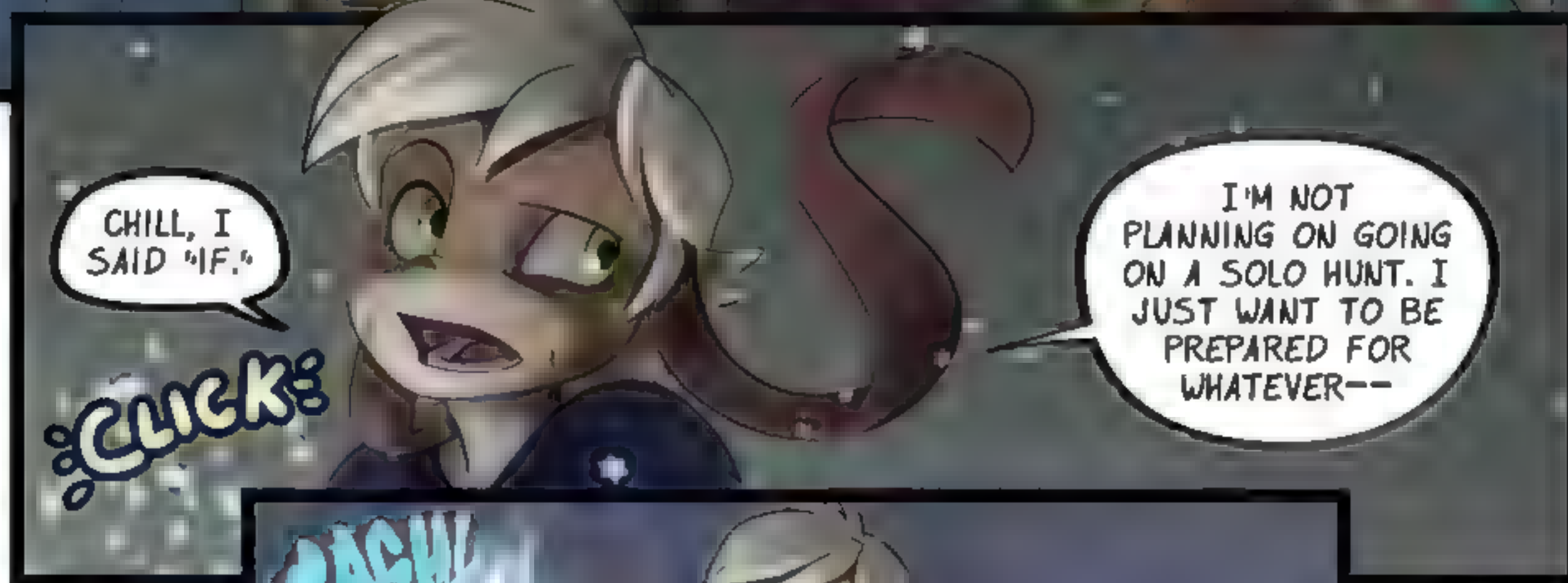
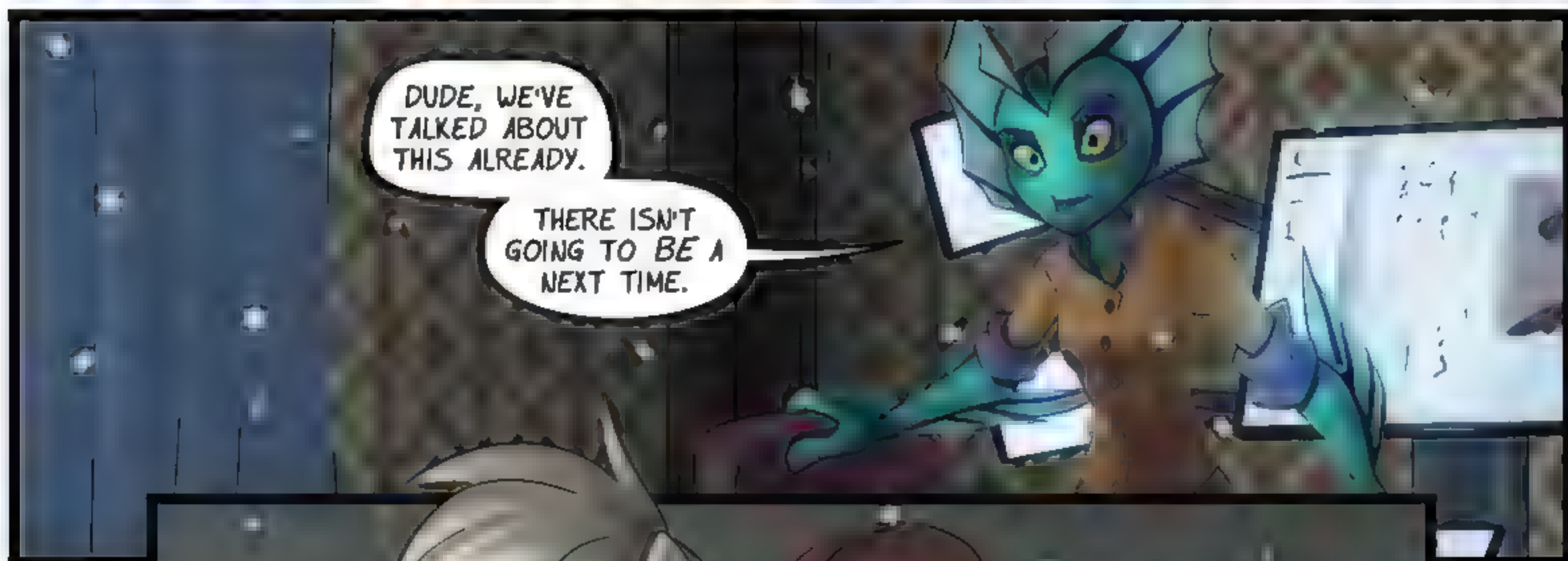
THERE'S GOTTA
BE SOMETHING
ON HER.

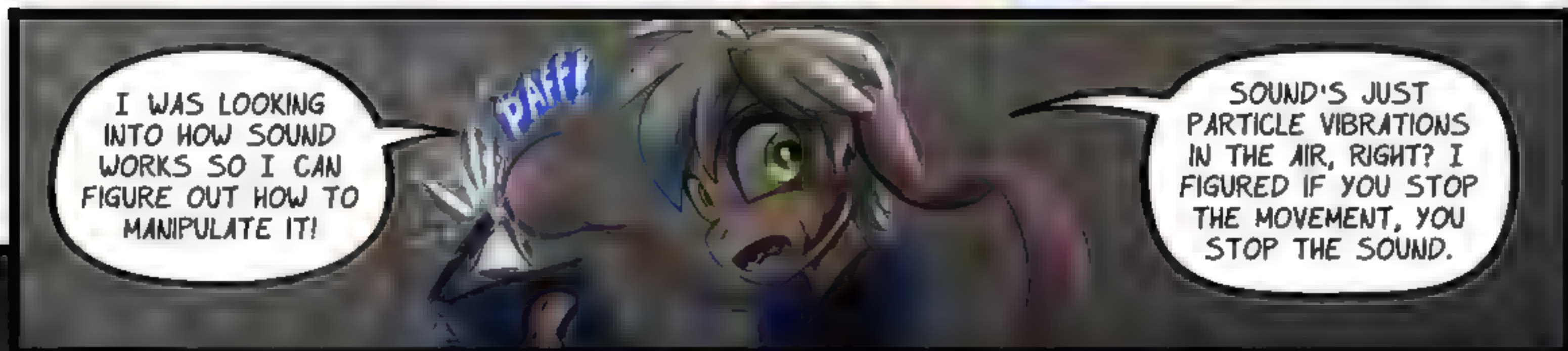
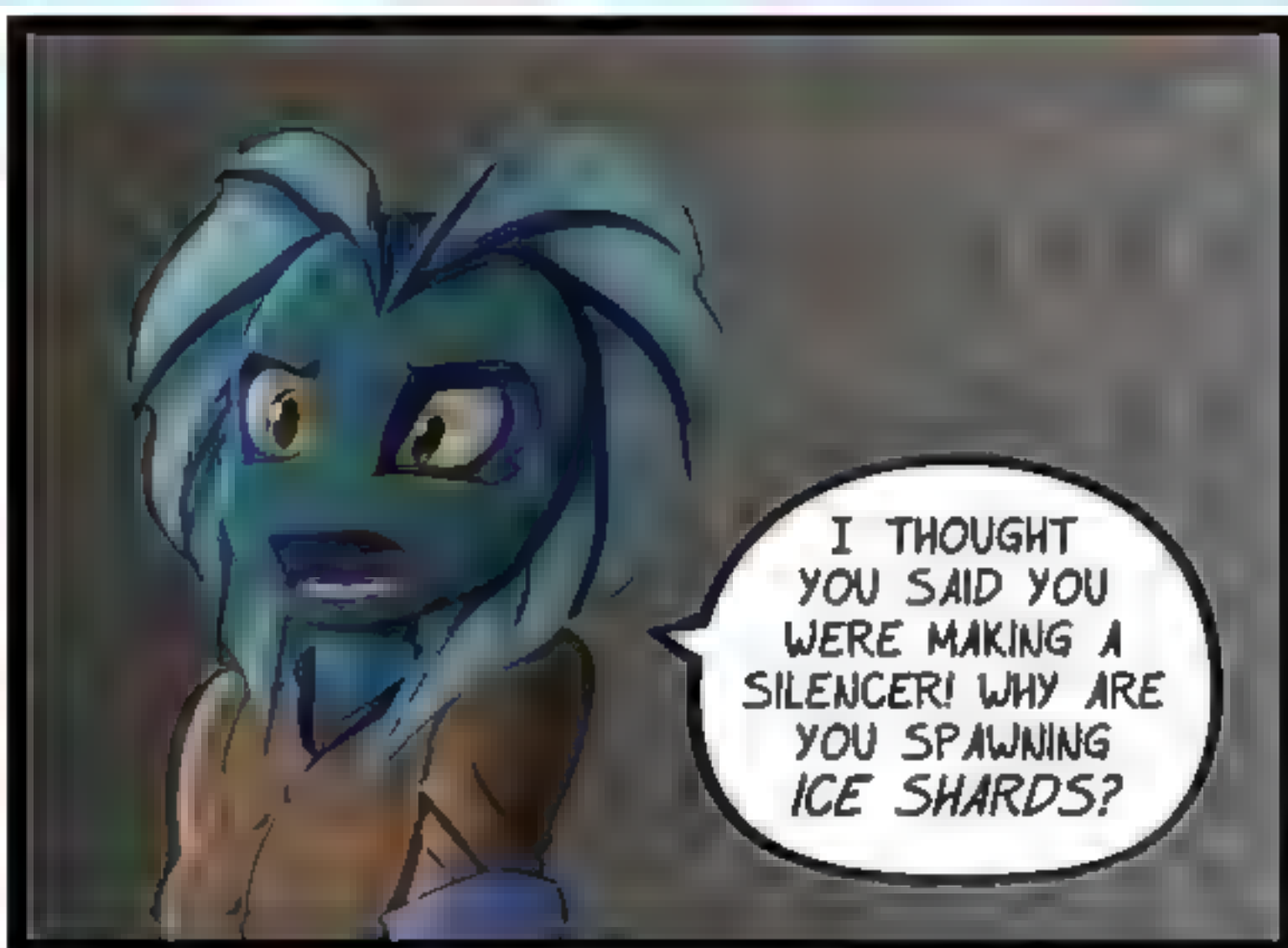
NOPE. ALL I'VE
GOT SO FAR IS A FEW
EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS
FROM LOCAL NEWS.

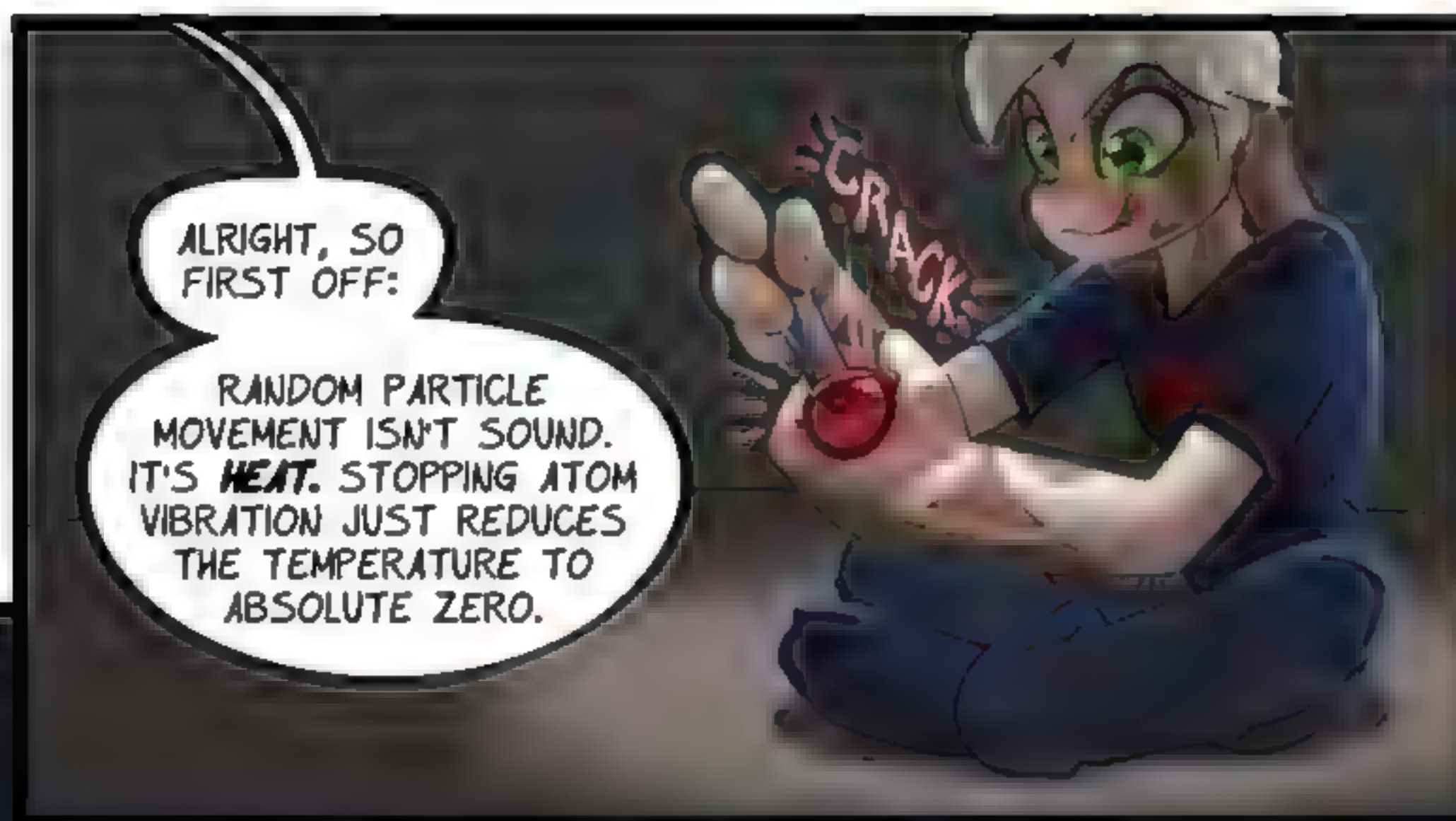
IT'S ALMOST AS
IF THE RHO-DA-AGNA
PURGES NEW RECRUITS
FROM THE GRID AS
SOON AS THEY
SIGN UP.

OKAY, FINE, BUT
SHE'S A **HUNDRED FOOT
TITAN**. YOU'D THINK SHE'D
HAVE A REPUTATION
OR SOMETHING.









ALRIGHT, SO
FIRST OFF:

RANDOM PARTICLE
MOVEMENT ISN'T SOUND.
IT'S **HEAT**. STOPPING ATOM
VIBRATION JUST REDUCES
THE TEMPERATURE TO
ABSOLUTE ZERO.



SOUND IS THE
WAVE ACTION OF
THE PARTICLES,
SPECIFICALLY.



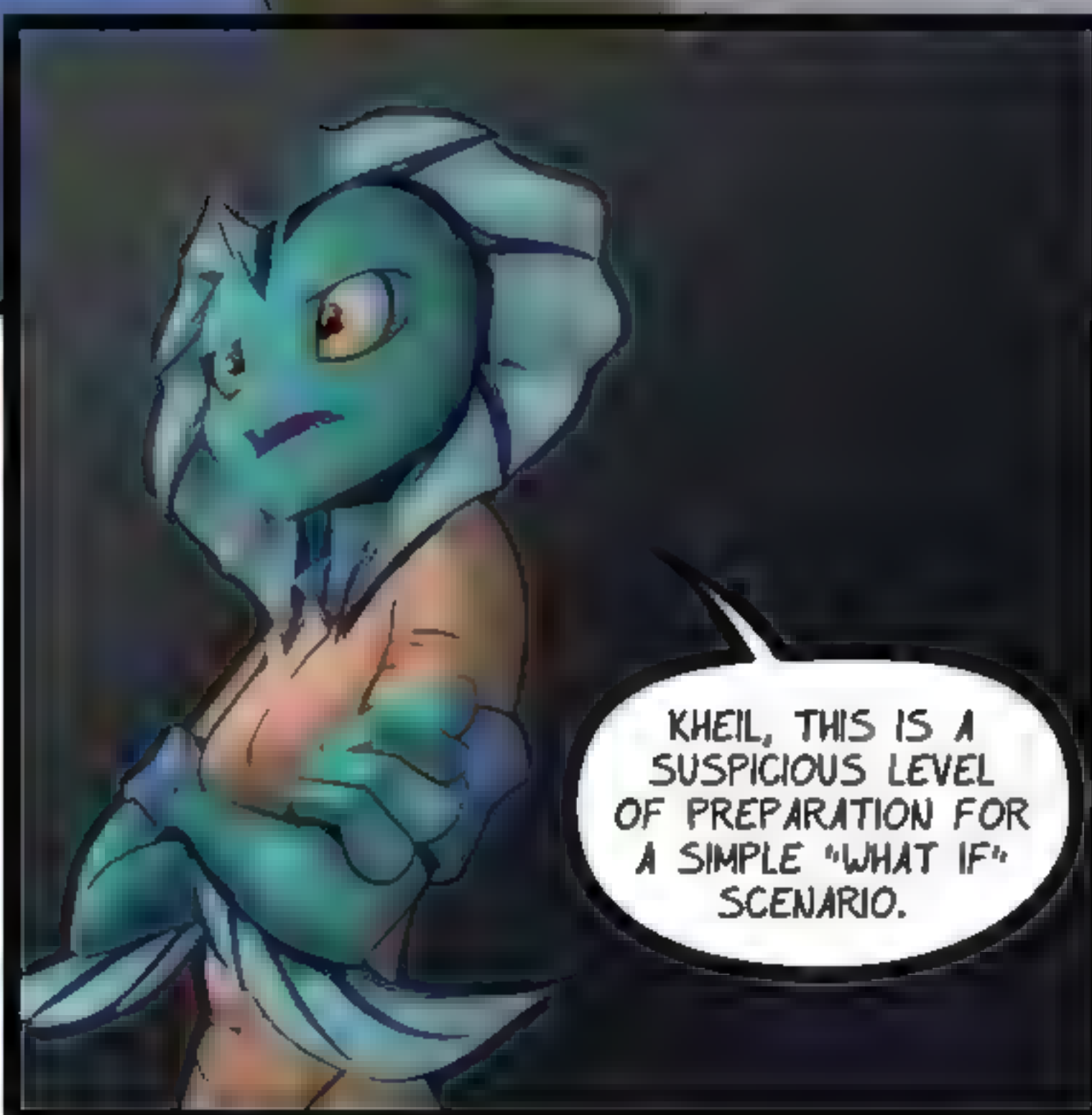
IF YOU WANT
TO REMOVE SOUND...
UH, LET'S SEE.

I CAN THINK
OF SEVERAL WAYS
TO DO THAT.

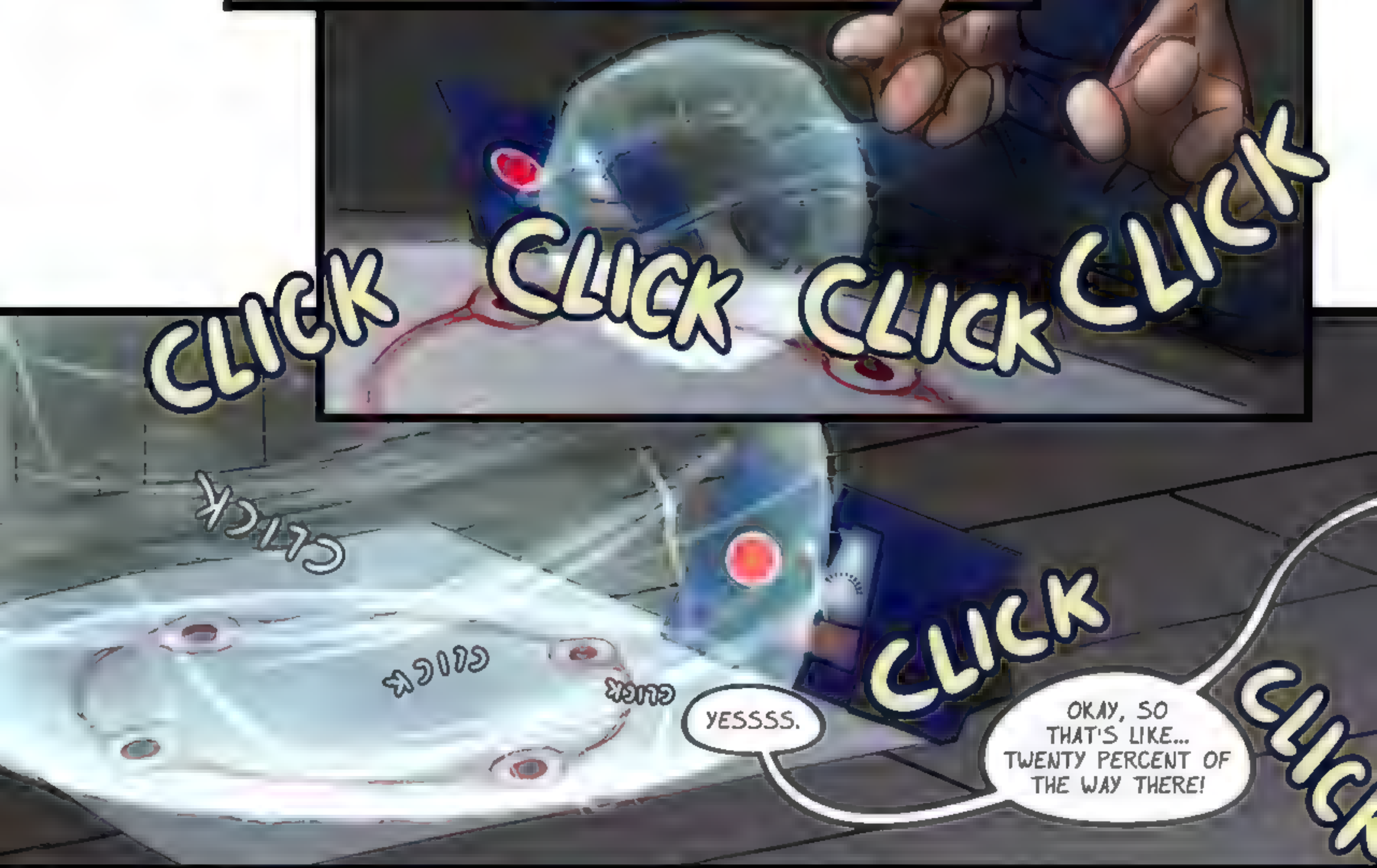
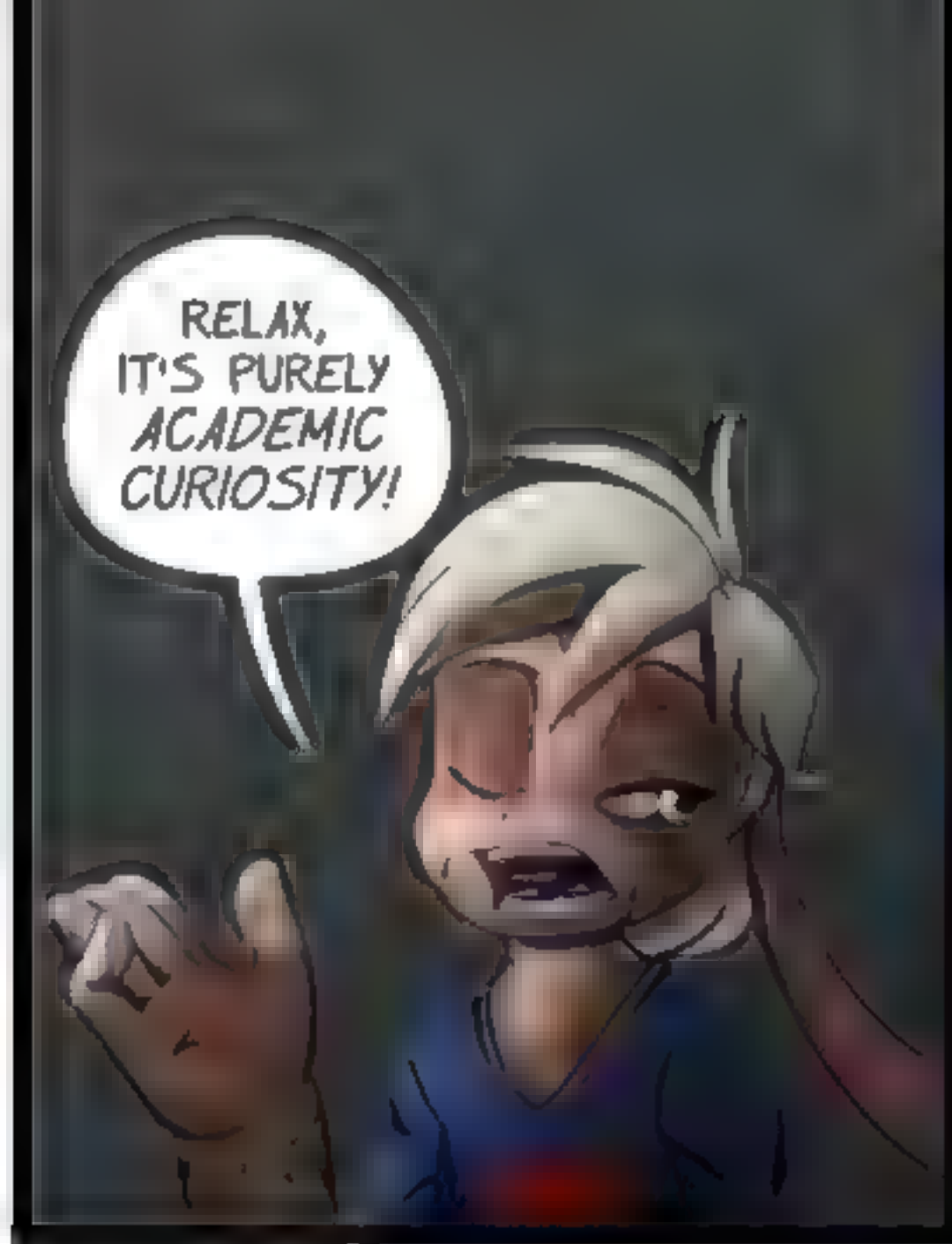
PERSONALLY, I'D GO
THE "NOISE-CANCELLING
HEADPHONES" ROUTE. YOU
COUNTER THEM WITH WAVES
OF EQUAL AND OPPOSITE
STRENGTH, SO THEY
NULLIFY EACH OTHER.

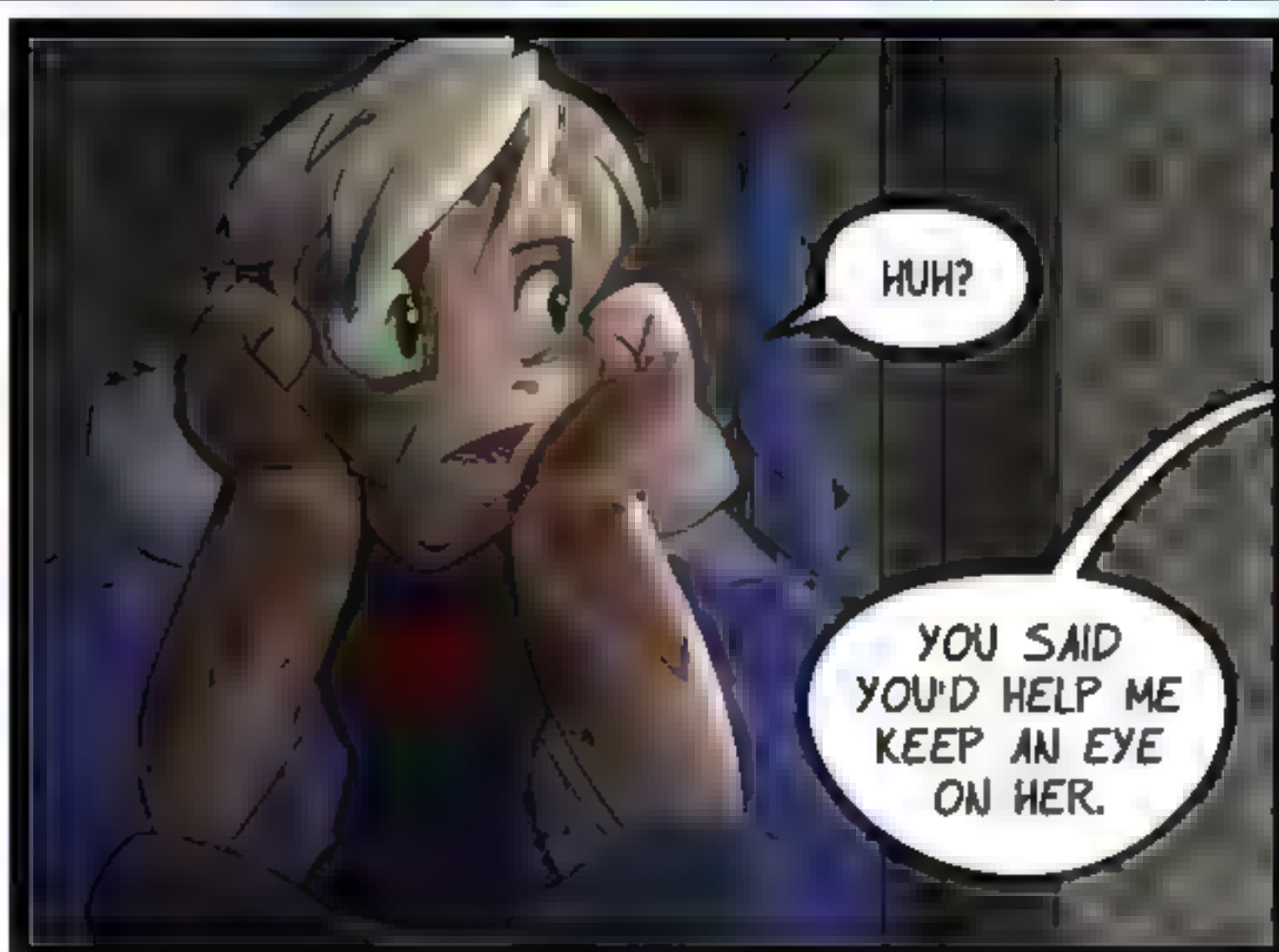
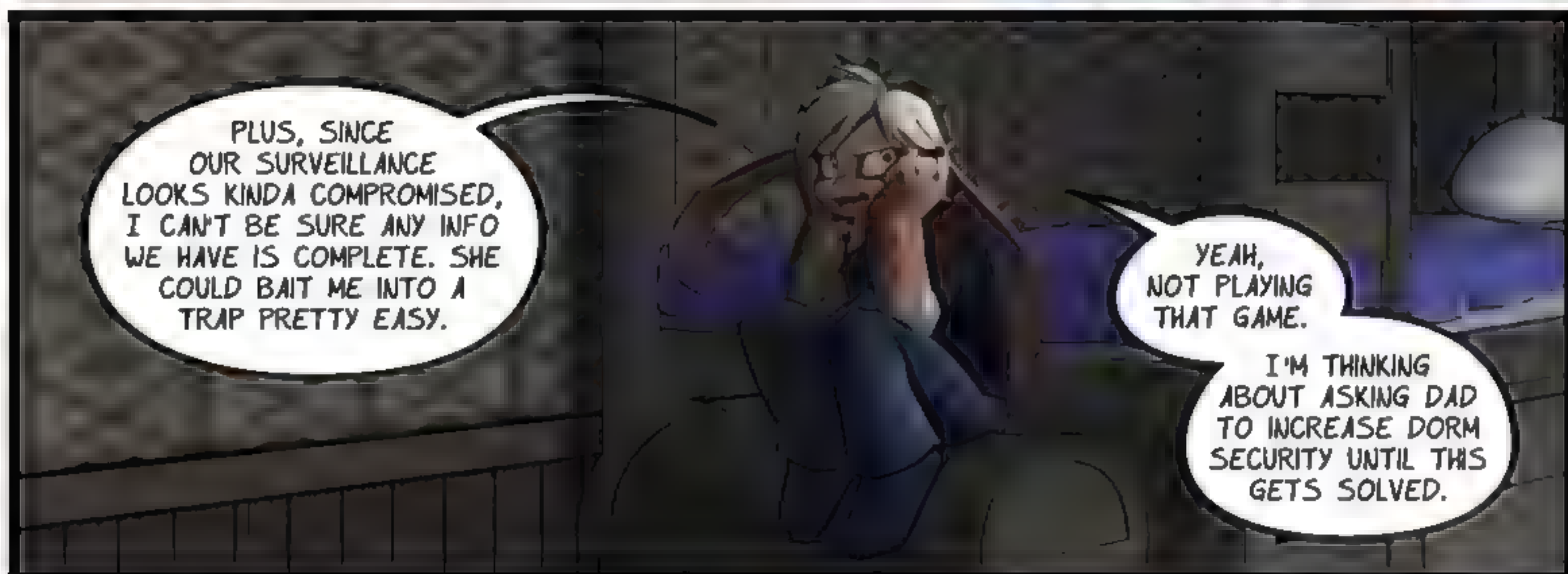


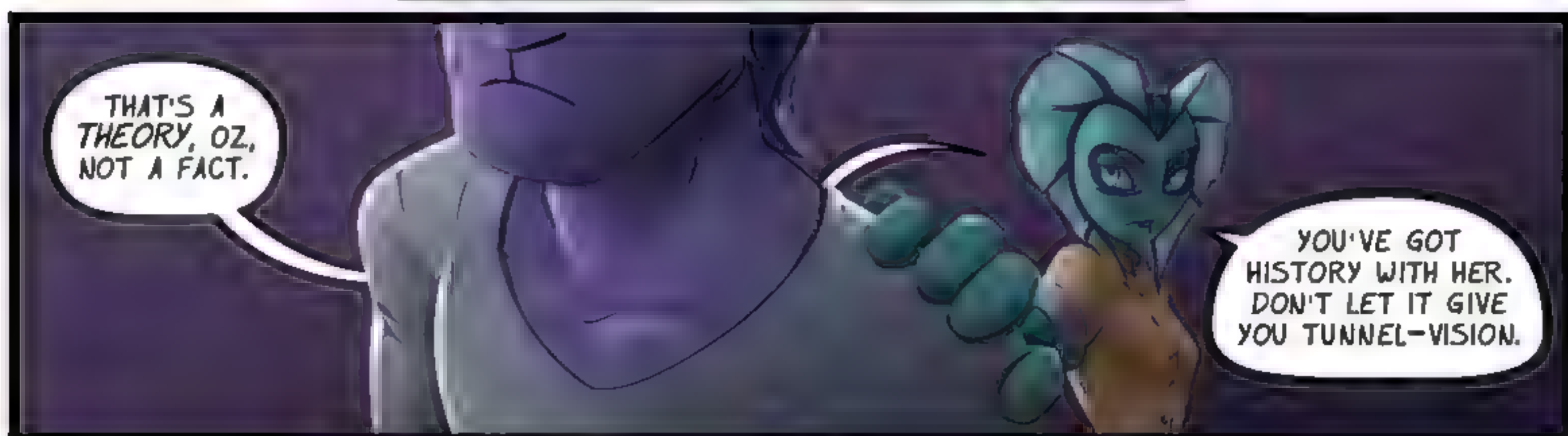
OOOHH,
THAT'S A
GOOD IDEA!
LEMME TRY
THAT ONE
NEXT--



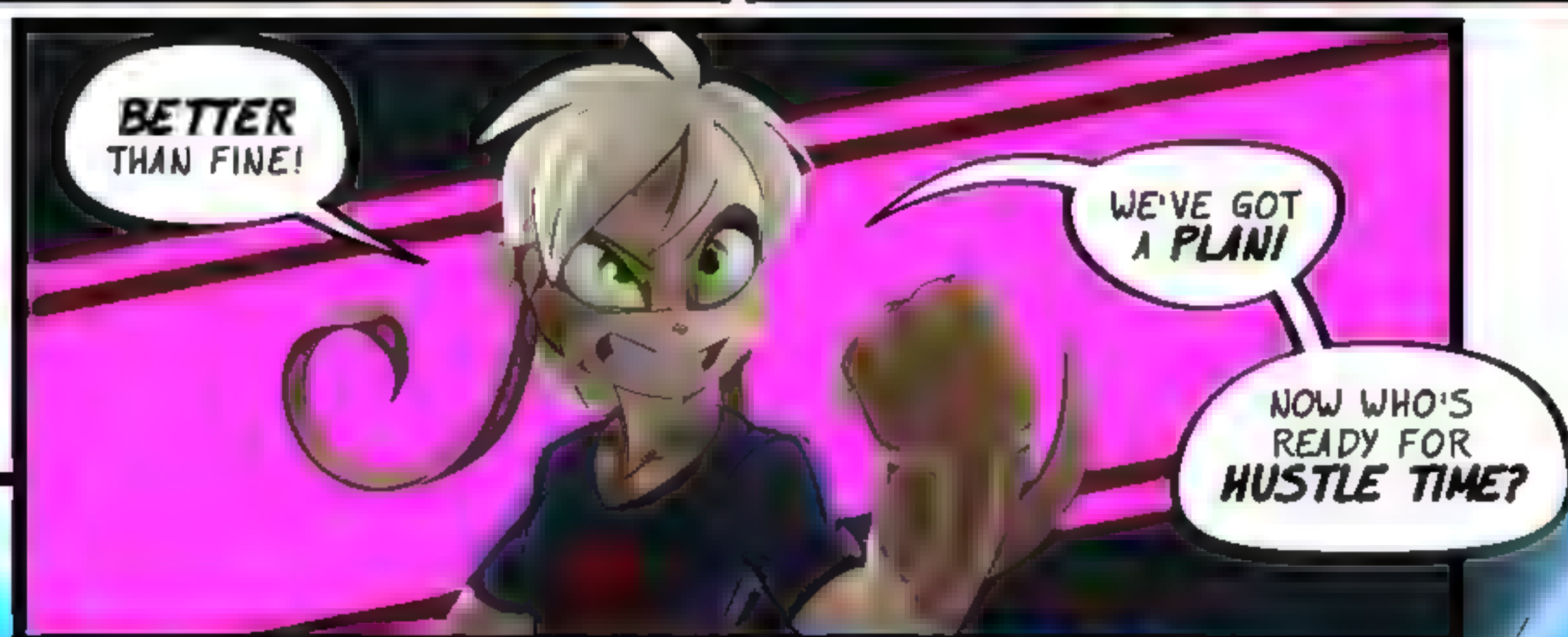
KHEIL, THIS IS A
SUSPICIOUS LEVEL
OF PREPARATION FOR
A SIMPLE "WHAT IF"
SCENARIO.









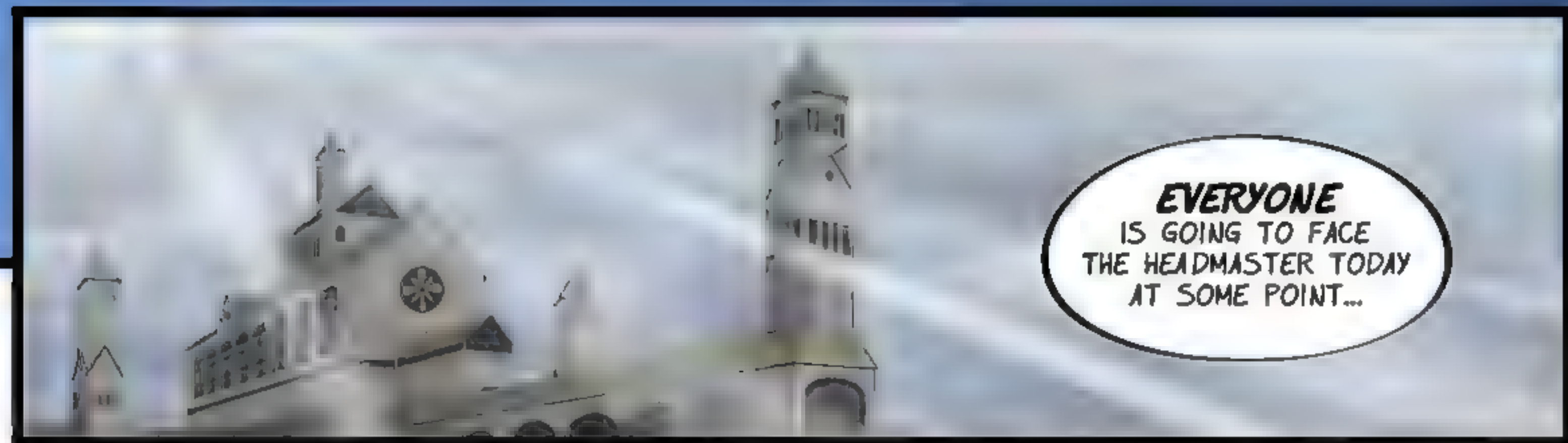


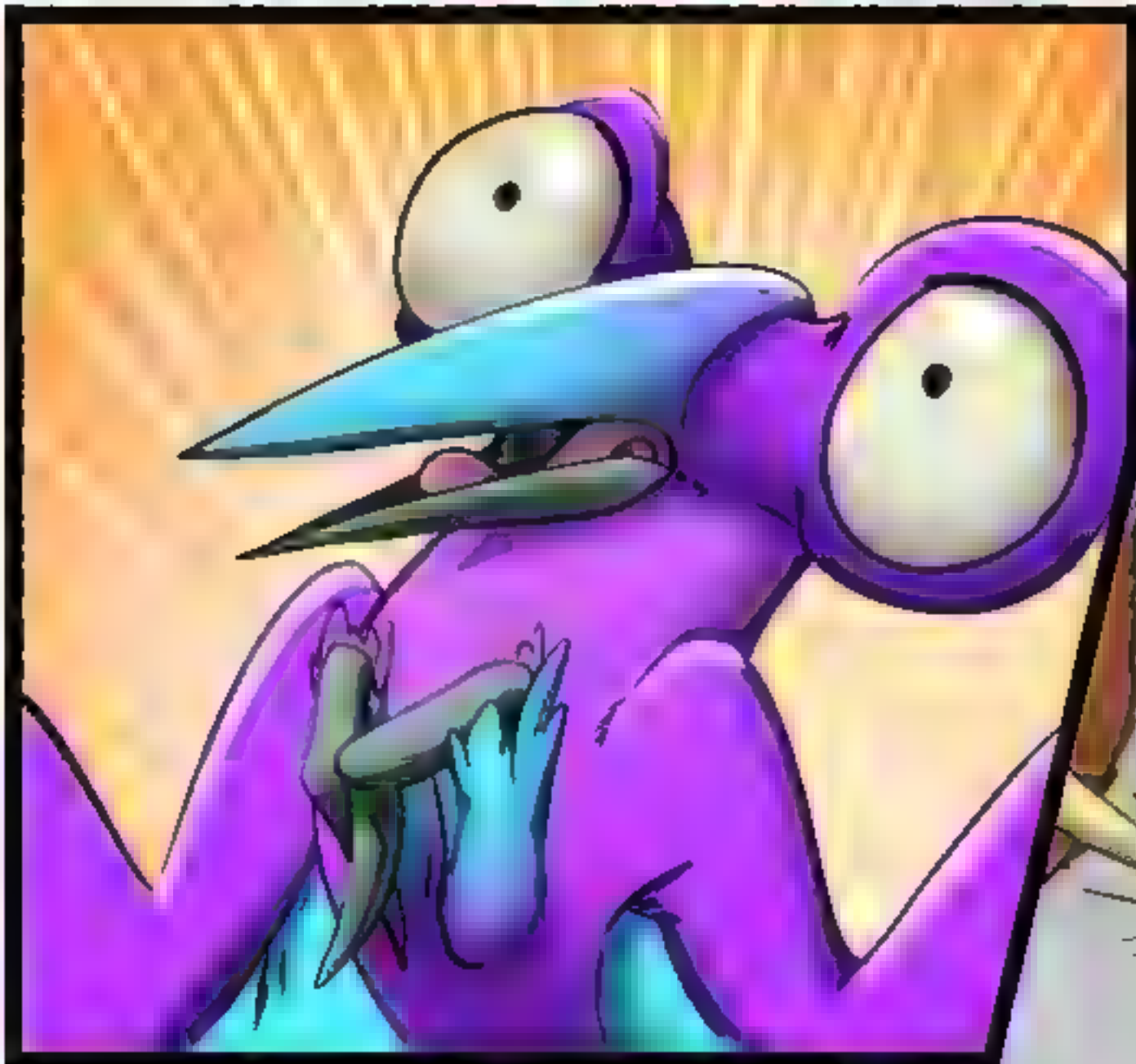
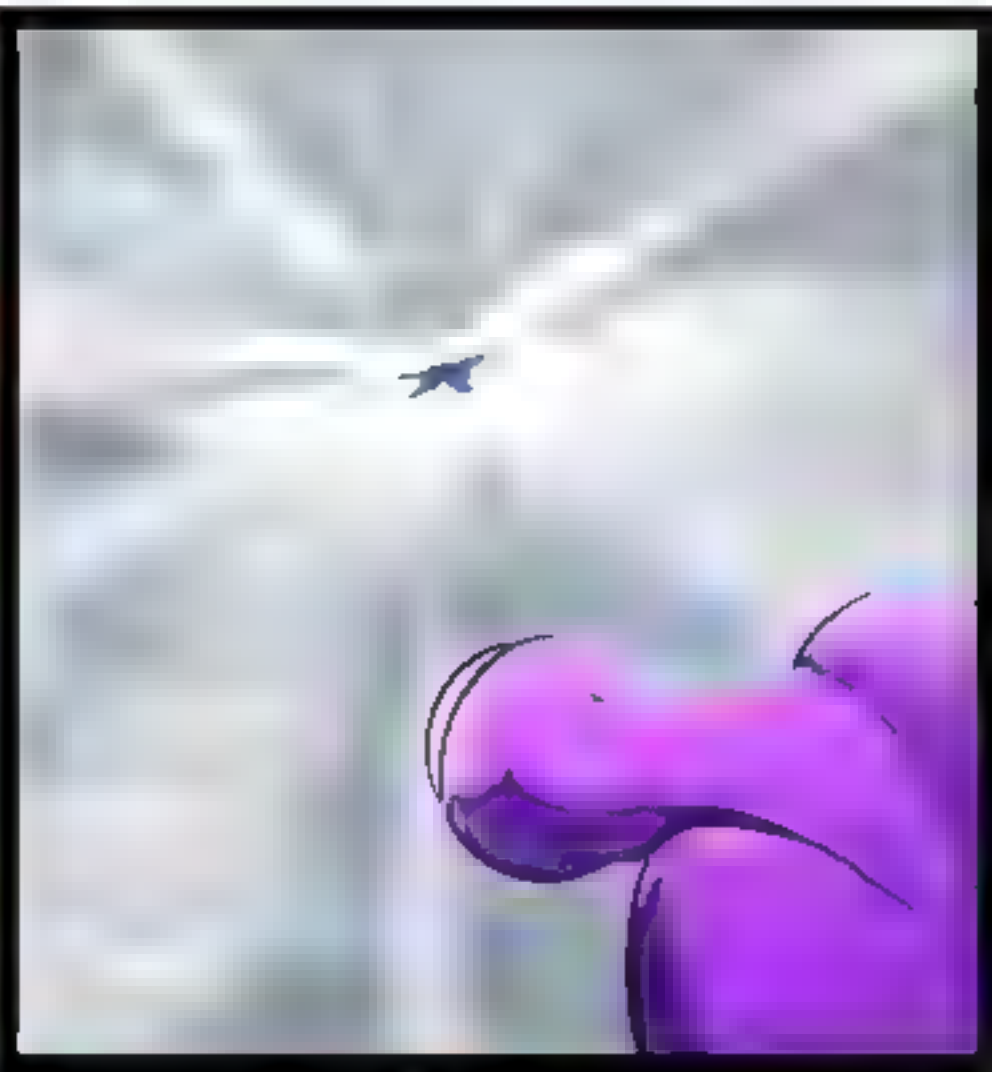
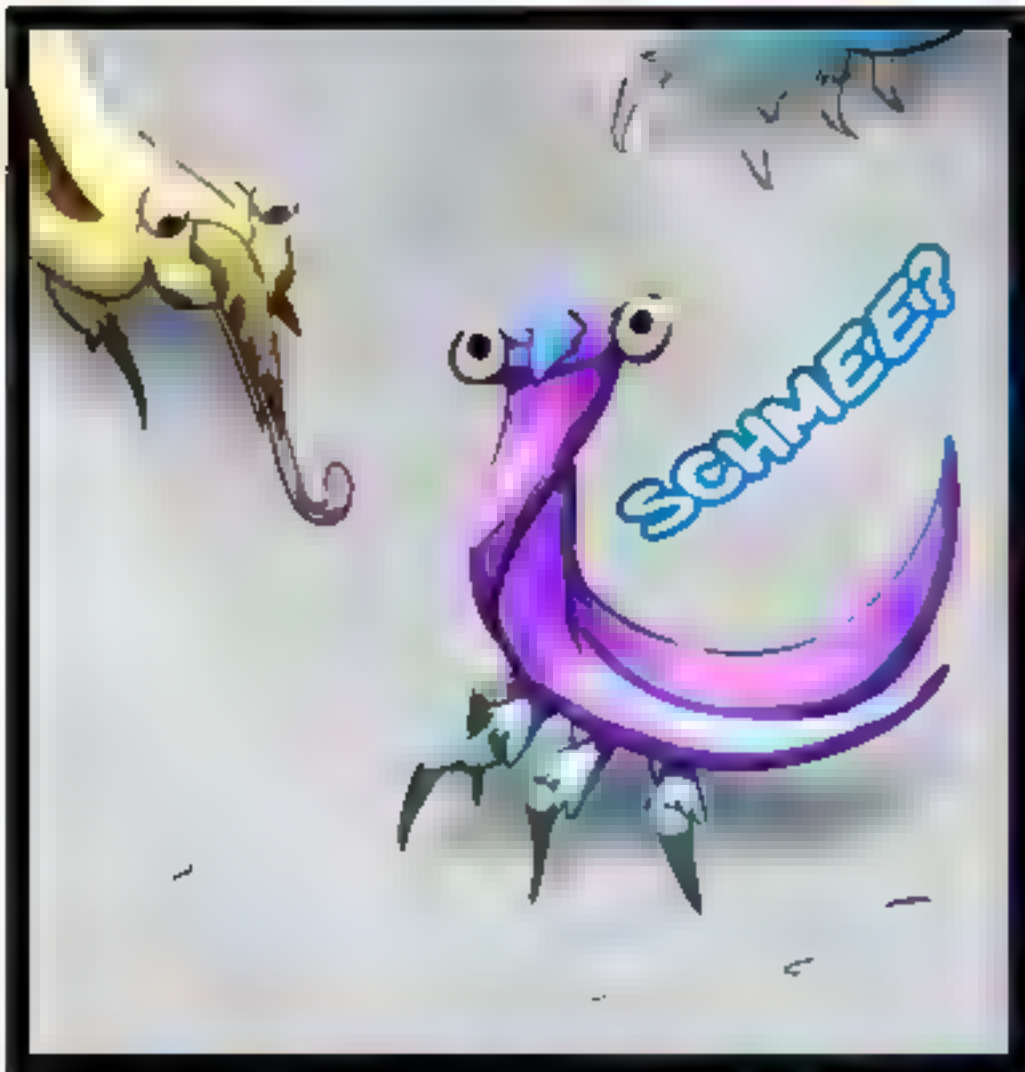


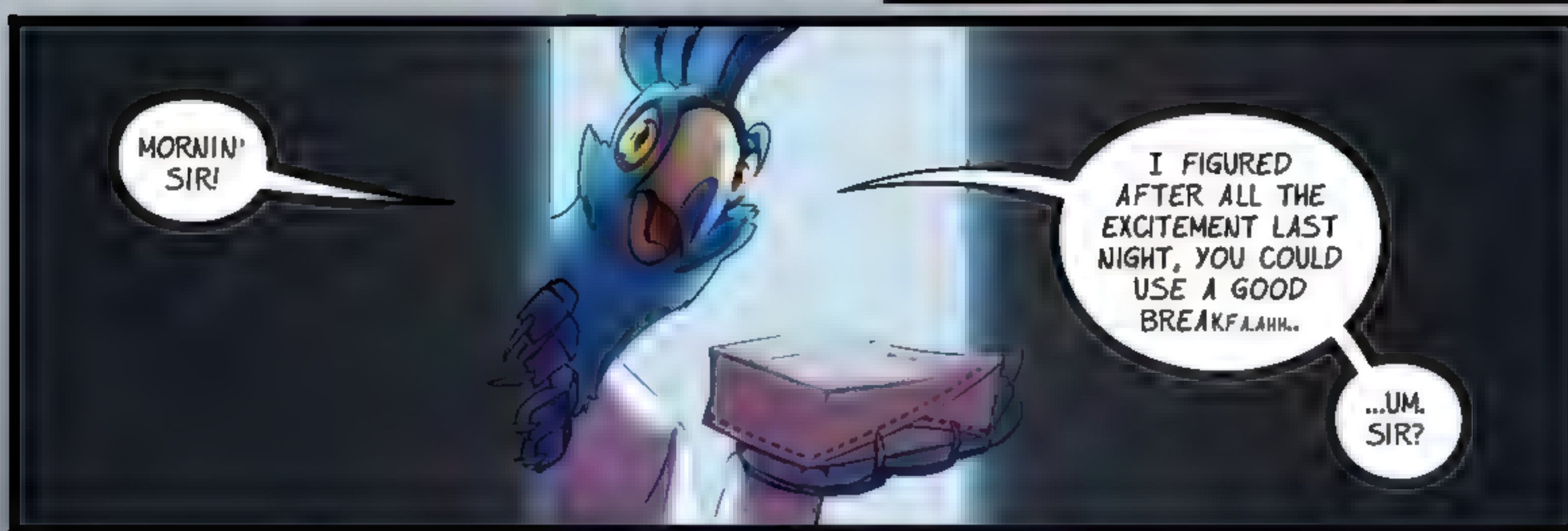
HNNNGG
THIS CAN'T
END WELL.

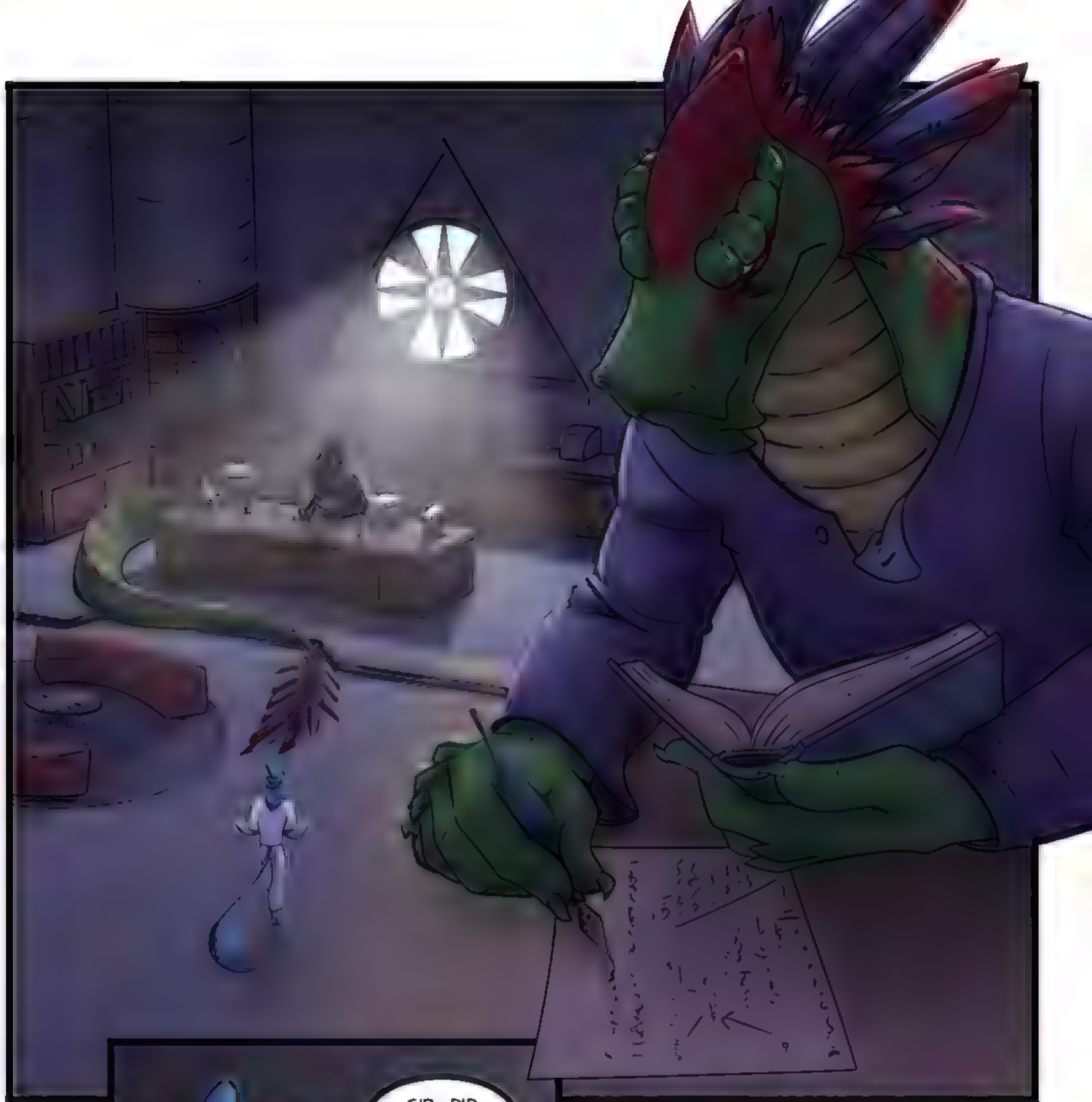
AH, DON'T
BE SO DOWN
ABOUT IT.
THINK OF IT
THIS WAY--

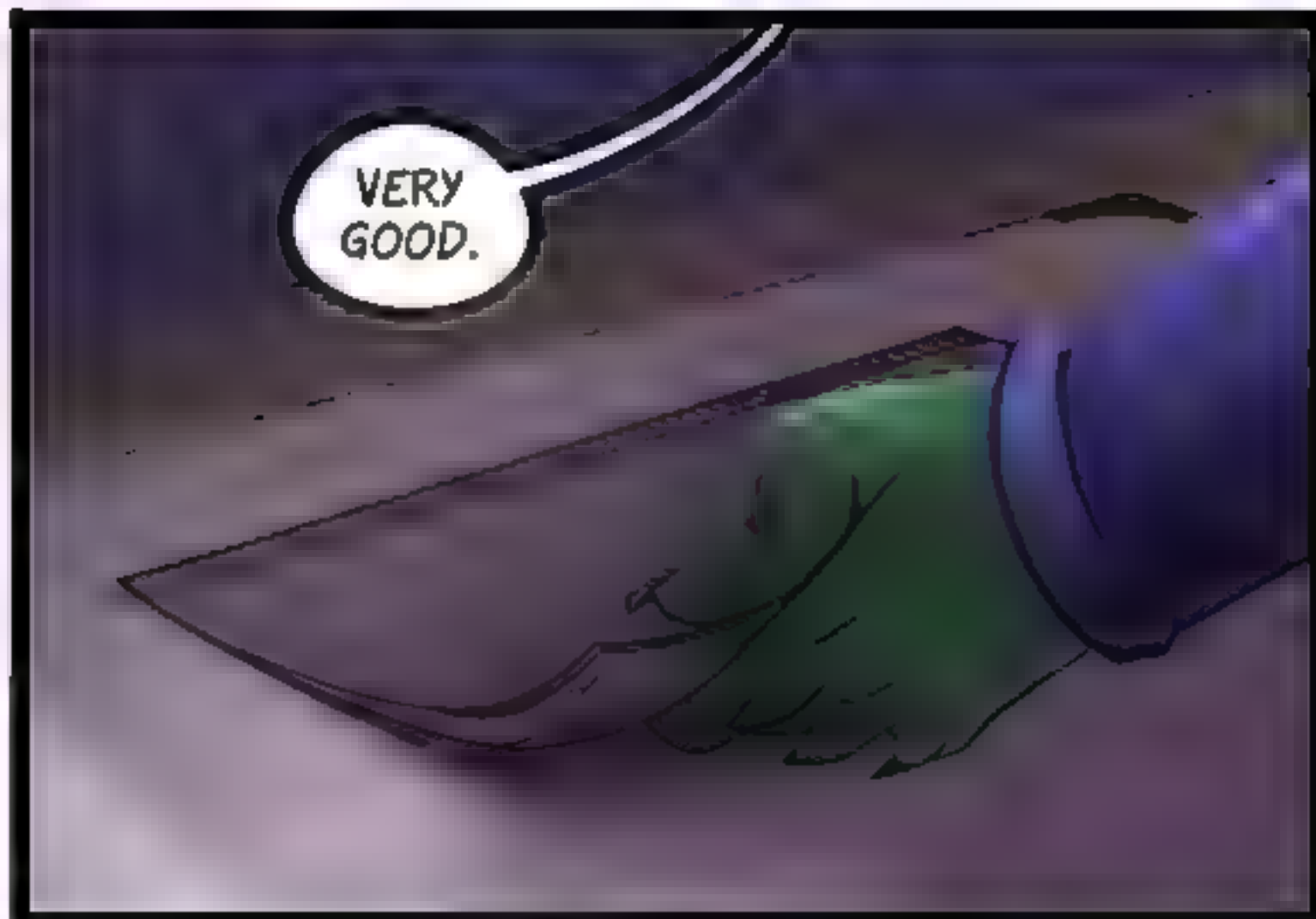
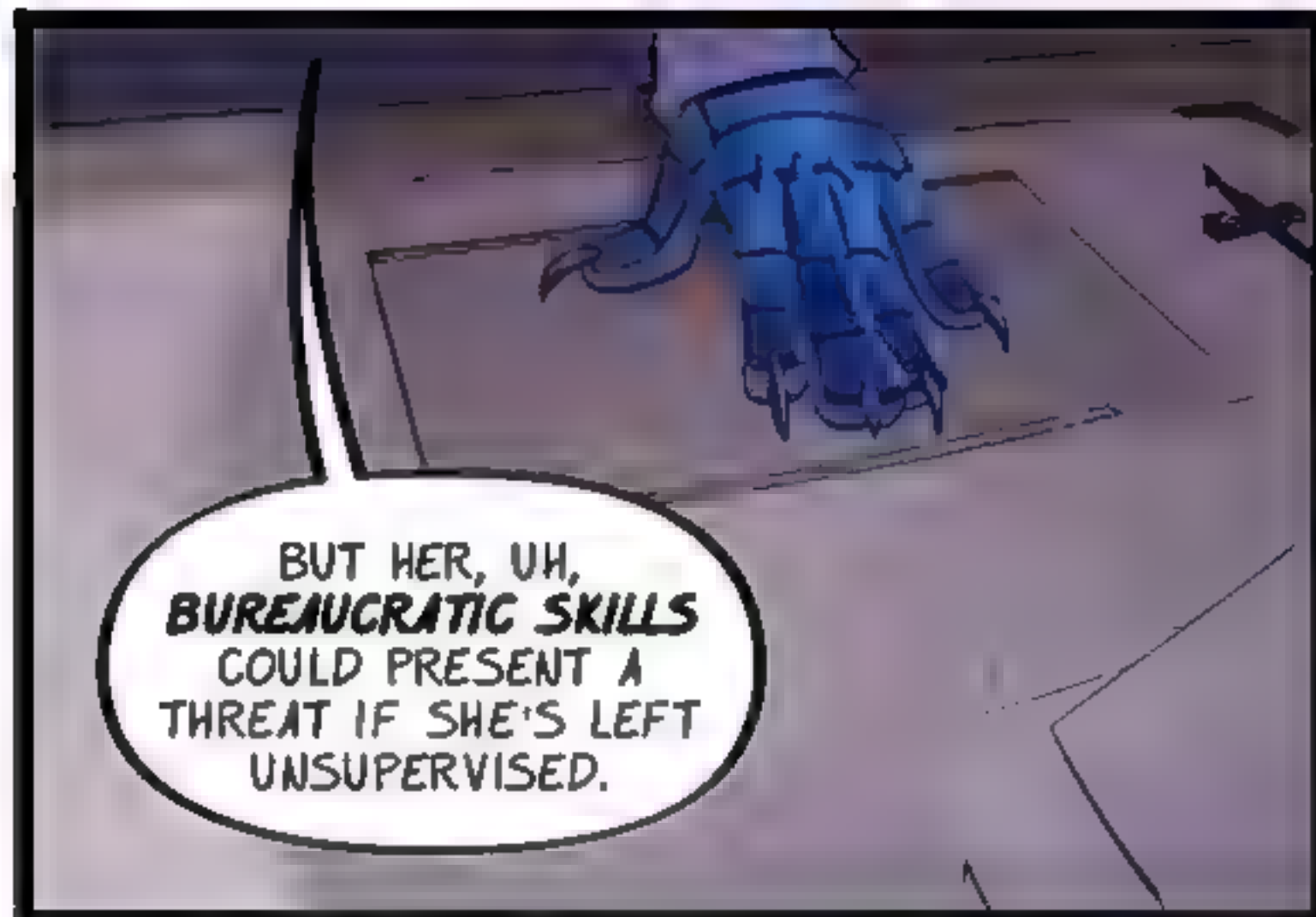
SWOOSH







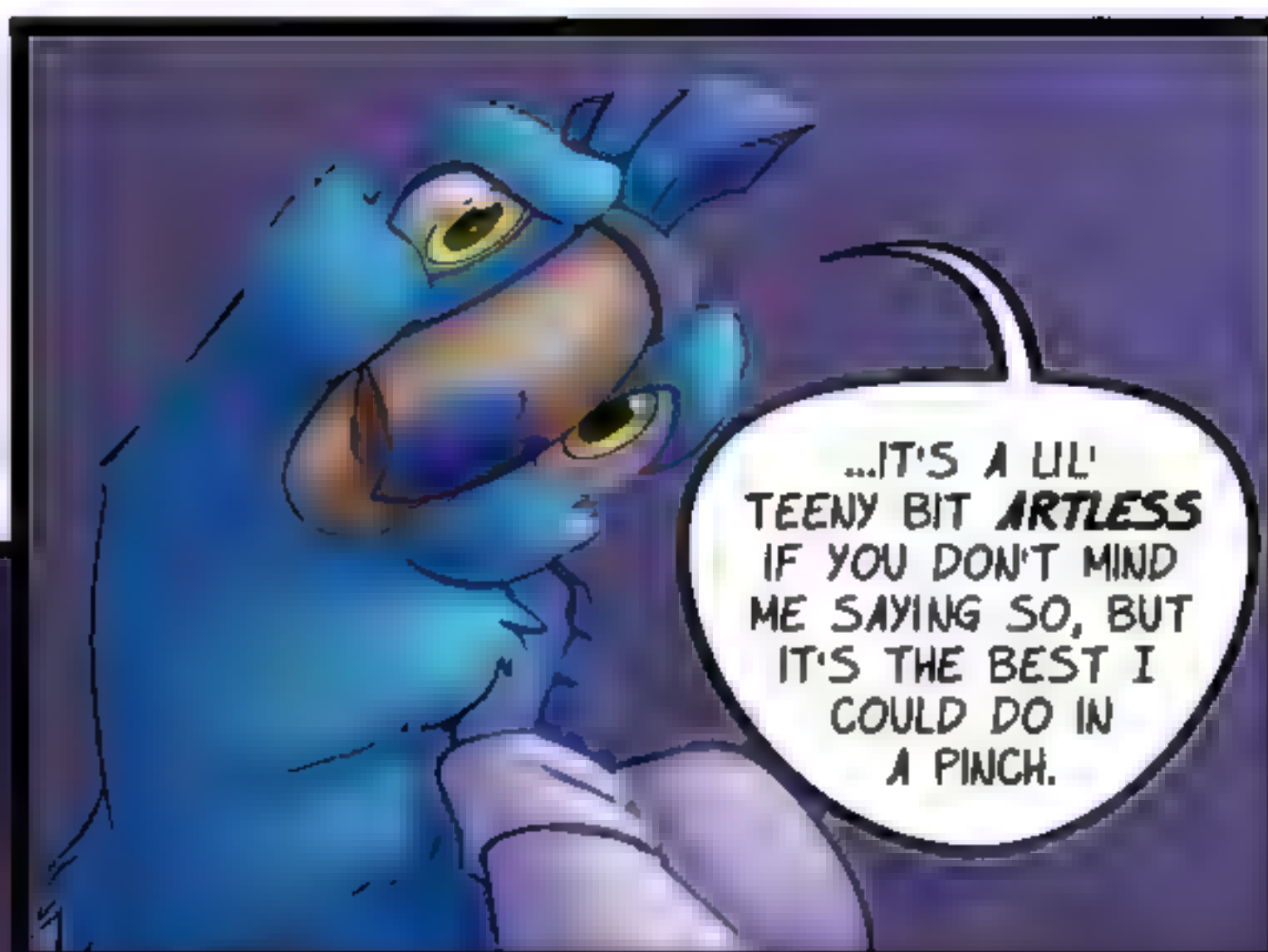






EUGHHH...

I HAVE,
SIR.



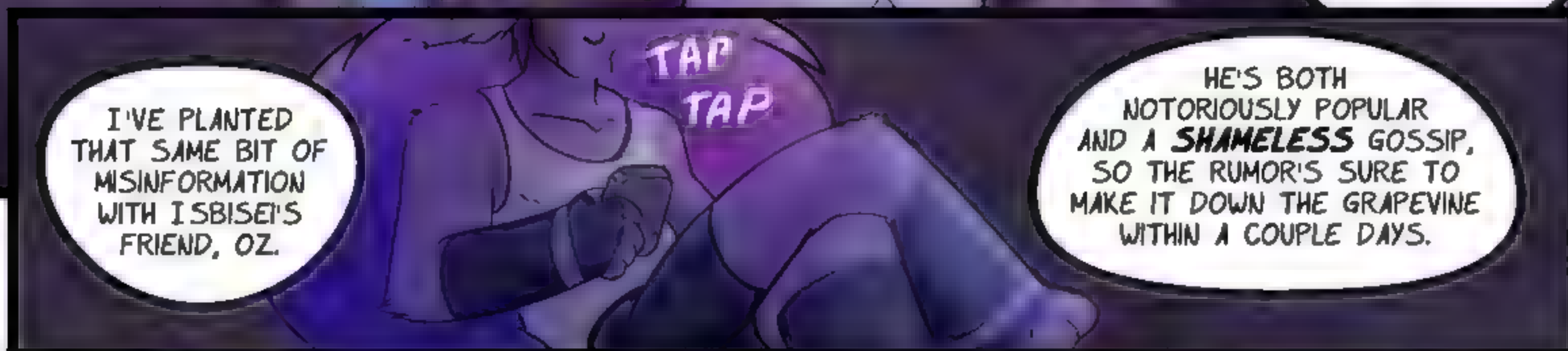
...IT'S A LIL'
TEENY BIT **ARTLESS**
IF YOU DON'T MIND
ME SAYING SO, BUT
IT'S THE BEST I
COULD DO IN
A PINCH.



CADET ISBISEI
AND MRS. BILISHT HAVE
BOTH, UH... "FIGURED OUT"
THAT I'M "COURTING"
THE INSPECTOR.

GAVE 'EM
THE BIG OL' PUPPY-
EYES ROUTINE. REAL
SAPPY STUFF.

I WOULDN'T
HAVE BOUGHT IT,
PERSONALLY, BUT
LUCKILY FOLKS
THINK I'M THE
VILLAGE IDIOT
AROUND HERE.



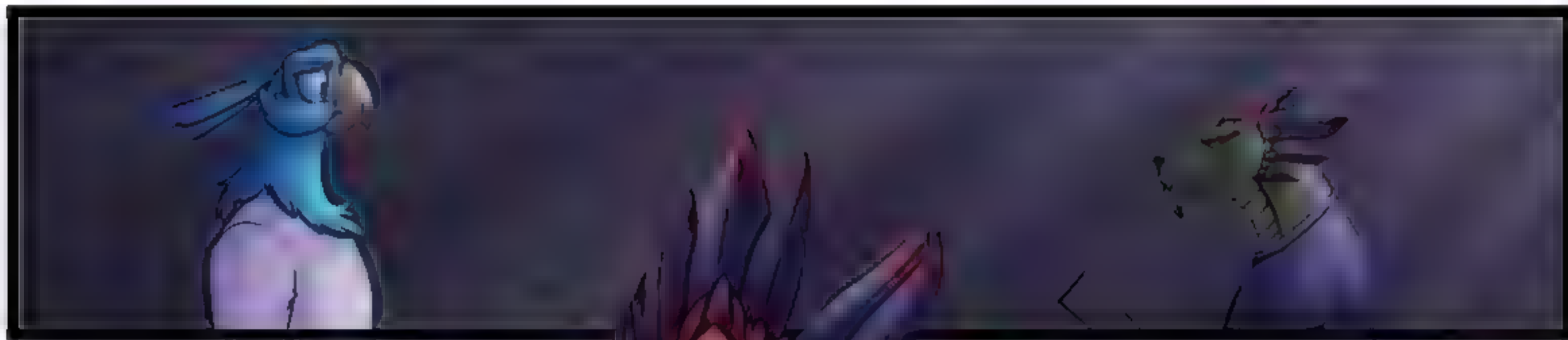
I'VE PLANTED
THAT SAME BIT OF
MISINFORMATION
WITH ISBISEI'S
FRIEND, OZ.

TAP
TAP

HE'S BOTH
NOTORIOUSLY POPULAR
AND A **SHAMELESS** GOSSIP,
SO THE RUMOR'S SURE TO
MAKE IT DOWN THE GRAPEVINE
WITHIN A COUPLE DAYS.



PRETTY SOON,
NOBODY WILL QUESTION
WHY I'M HANGING
AROUND HER.



THAT... IS MOST CERTAINLY "ARTLESS," YES.

BUT I SUPPOSE IT WILL HAVE TO DO UNTIL WE CAN GET YOU A MORE SOLID ALIBI.



NOW...

I AM AWARE THAT I HAVE NEVER ASKED YOU TO TURN YOUR SKILLS AGAINST A CIVILIAN.

I APOLOGIZE FOR THE FACT THAT THIS ONE SOMEHOW SLIPPED OUR NET.



BUT, FOR THE RECORD:

YOU ARE **CERTAIN** THAT, SHOULD THE NEED ARISE...



...YOU ARE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH HER AS THOUGH SHE WERE AN ENEMY OPERATIVE?



YOU SOME
KINDA KNUCKLEHEAD,
ZHAAZZY? WHEN YOUR
INTERNAL SIREN STARTS
GOING OFF LIKE THAT,
YOU **LISTEN**.

WE HAVE ALL
LOST YEARS OF
SLEEP TO OUR GUILTY
CONSCIENCES...

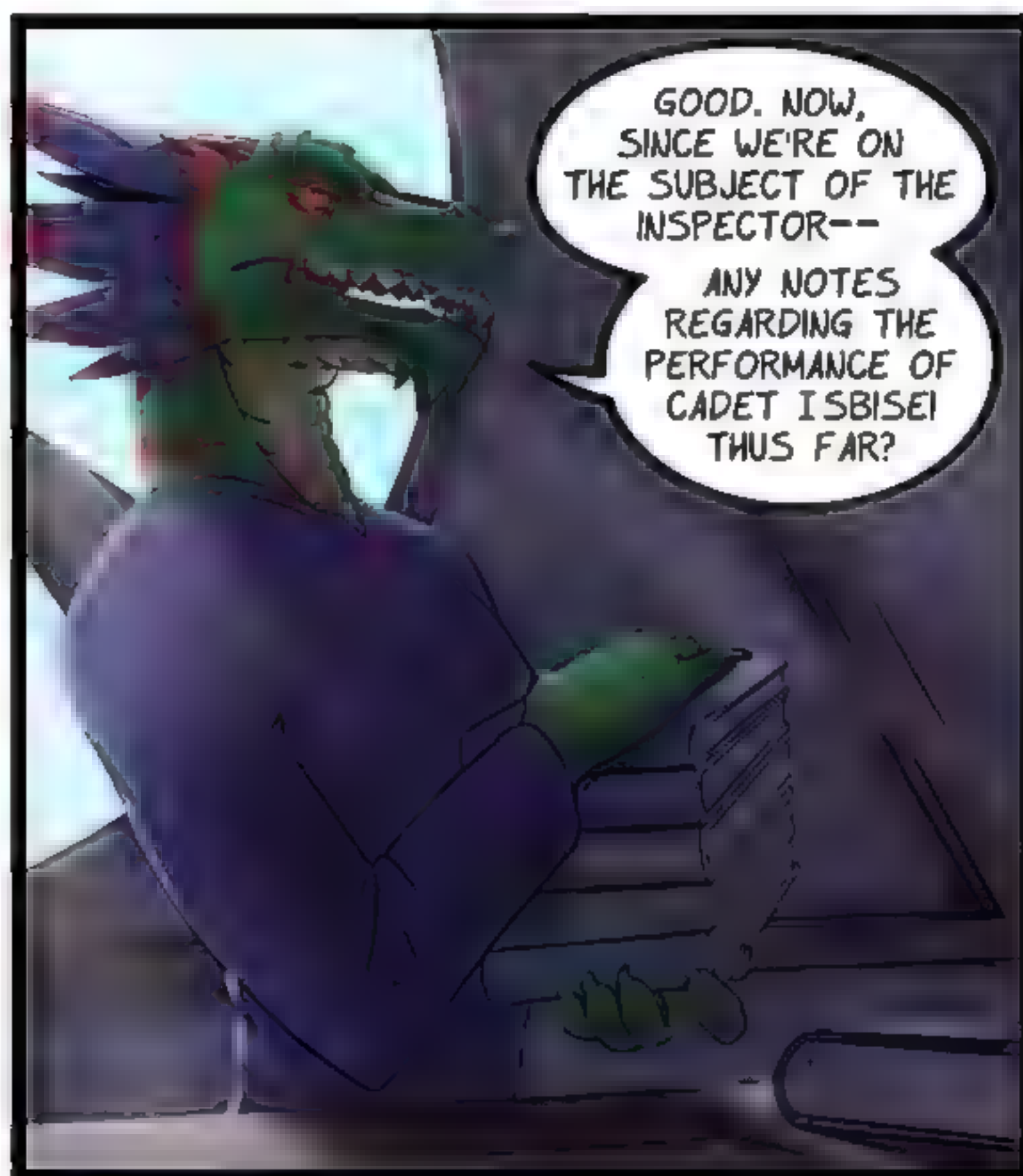
...BUT
YOU'VE SEEN
OUR ENEMY.

WE NO LONGER
HAVE THE LUXURY
OF CONSCIENCE.

THE BLOOD ON
KRAON'S HANDS--
AND ON OURS-- IS
THE SACRIFICE THAT
WILL SAVE US ALL.



ABSOLUTELY.



GOOD. NOW,
SINCE WE'RE ON
THE SUBJECT OF THE
INSPECTOR--
ANY NOTES
REGARDING THE
PERFORMANCE OF
CADET ISBISEI
THUS FAR?



SHE WAS A
GOOD CHOICE, SIR!
FOCUSED AND COMPETENT.
DIDN'T EVEN LOSE HER
COOL WHEN I PUSHED
HER BUTTONS A BIT
WITH THE VILLAGE
IDIOT STUFF.



HEH...
IN FACT, SHE
ENDED UP PUSHING
MINE RIGHT BACK.
THAT KID'S
REALLY SOMETHING
ELSE, SIR.



THOUGH I DO
ASK THAT YOU REFRAIN
FROM "PUSHING HER BUTTONS"
FOR THE REMAINDER OF HER
ASSIGNMENT, GIVEN THE
NATURE OF THE
SITUATION.
SHE MAY BE
A STAR STUDENT,
BUT THAT DOESN'T
MAKE HER A FULLY
TRAINED COUNTERSPY.
LET HER FOCUS.

THIS IS
GOOD TO
HEAR.

CAN DO,
SIR.
AH, AND
ONE LAST
THING--

KEEP YOUR
SCHEDULE CLEAR TODAY,
IN CASE OF ANY DEVELOPMENTS
REGARDING OUR POTENTIAL
SECURITY BREACH.

FOR NOW, TAKE
THESE BACK TO THE
LIBRARY FOR ME AND
CHECK IN WITH
THE INSPECTOR.

NOTIFY ME OF
ANY CHANGES IN YOUR
OBSERVATIONS.

UH...

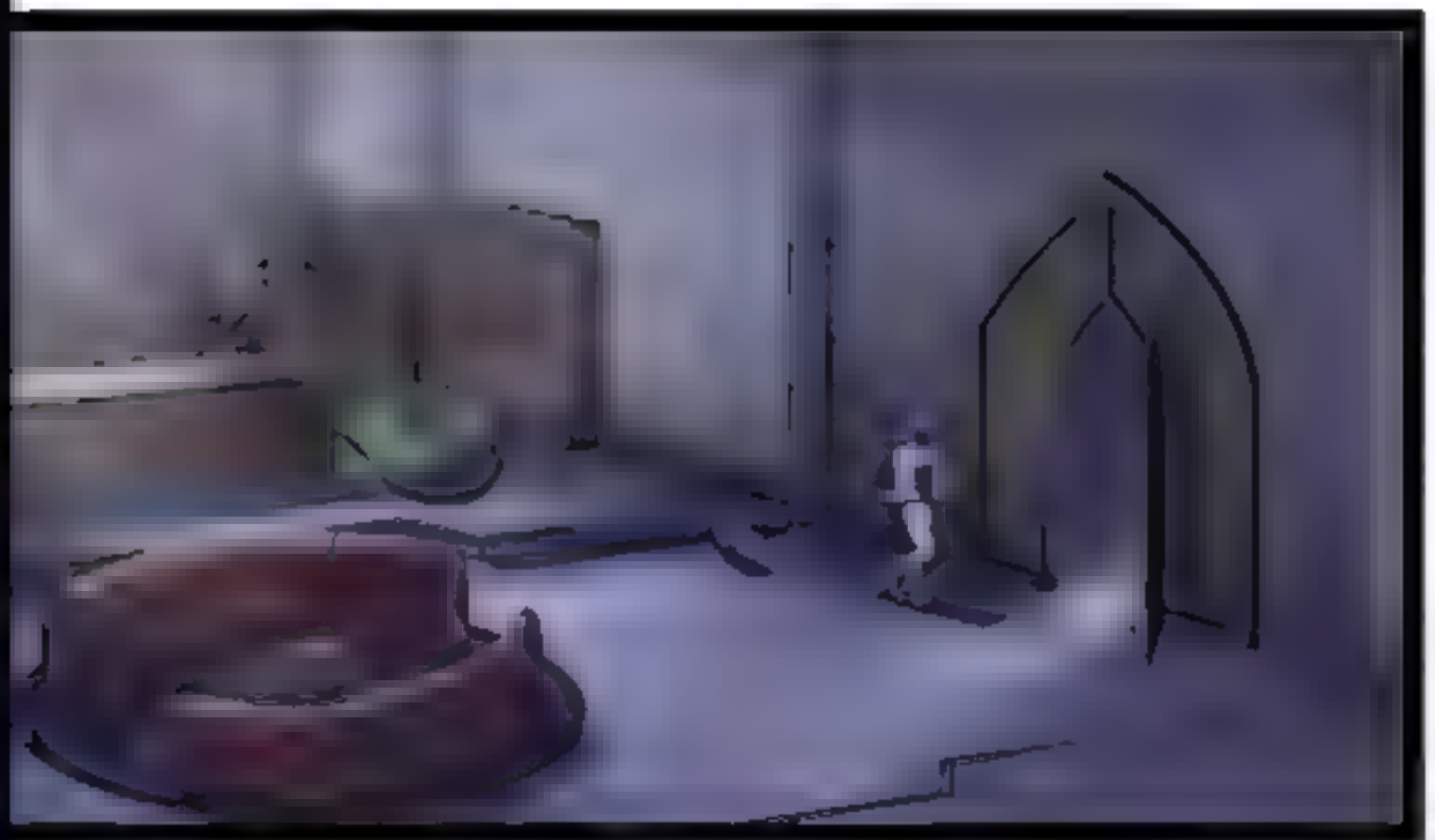
ARE THESE
PARENTING
BOOKS, SIR?

AH... YES,
TECHNICALLY.

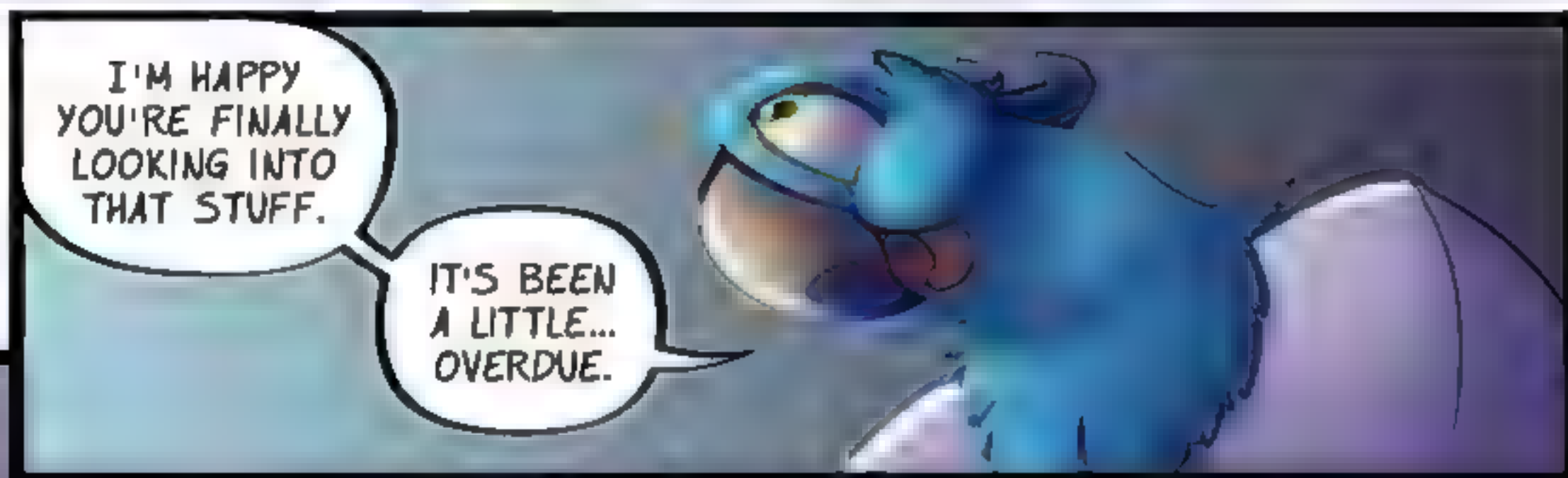
I'VE BEEN
TRAWLING THEIR
BIBLIOGRAPHIES
FOR ANY USEFUL
INFORMATION.

THEY REFERENCE
SEVERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL
STUDIES WHOSE DATA
COULD BE OF USE
TO OUR WORK.

YOU ARE
DISMISSED,
ZHAZE.



SPEAK.

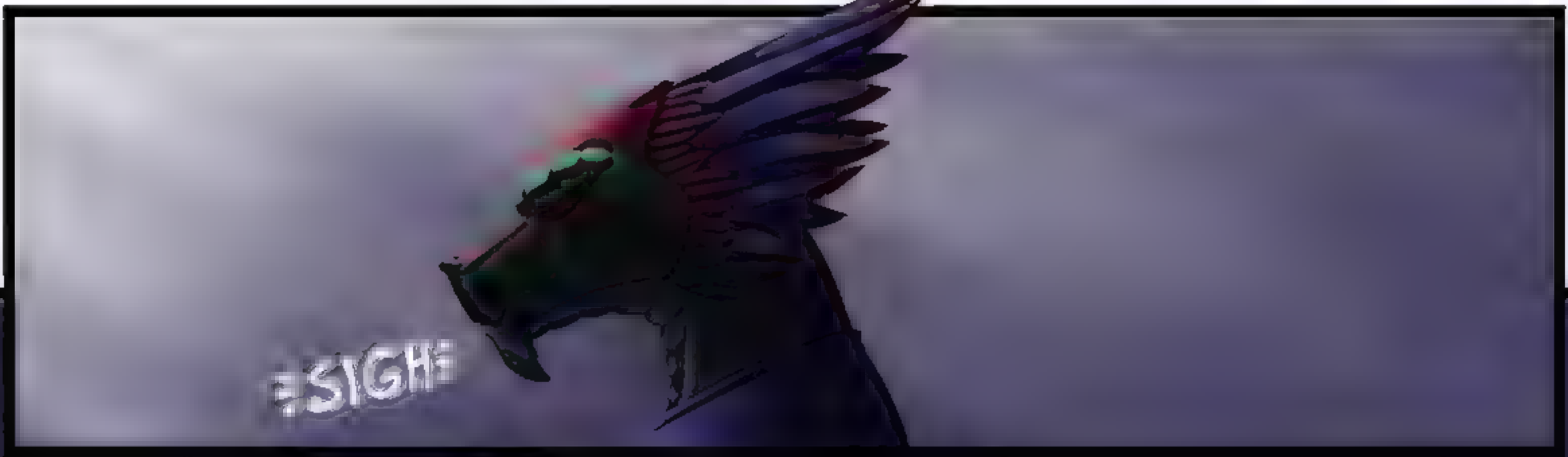


IT'S BEEN
A LITTLE...
OVERDUE.



WHAT?

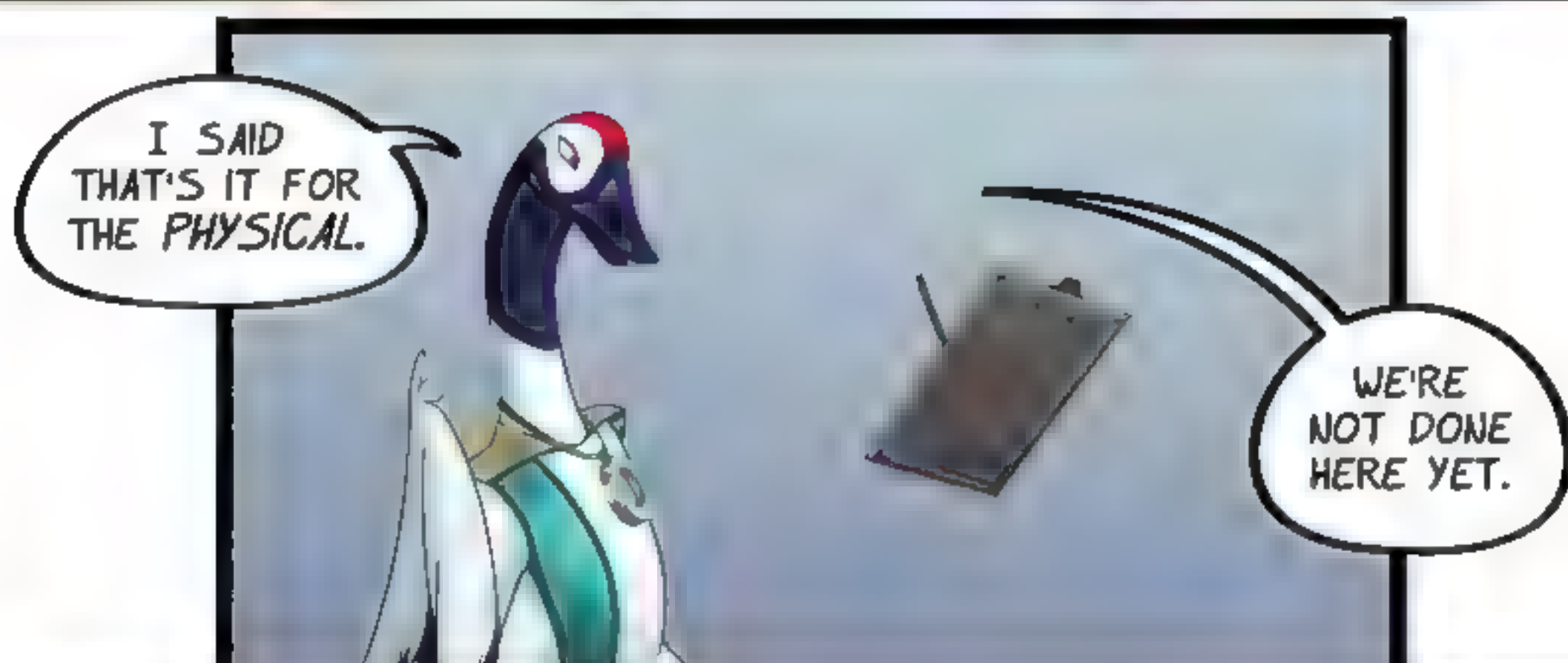




SIGH



AHEM...



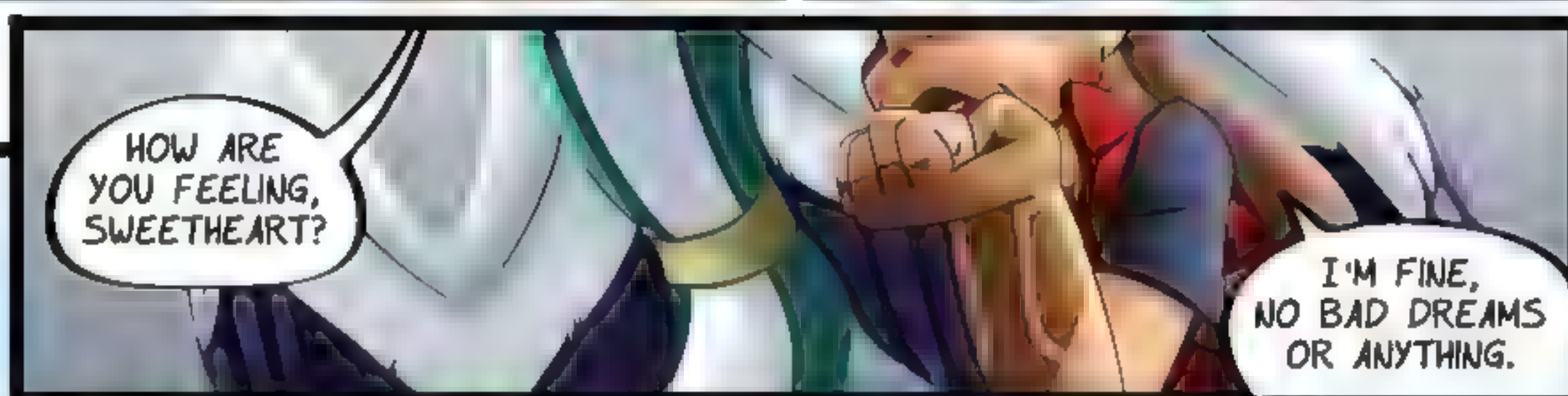


OH BOY.

IS THIS GONNA
TAKE AWHILE? I GOTTA
GET TO DAD'S OFFICE
PRETTY SOON.



NO, SILLY, I
JUST WANT TO BE
SURE YOU'RE DOING
ALRIGHT. ANYONE WOULD
BE SHAKEN AFTER A
NIGHT LIKE YOURS.



HOW ARE
YOU FEELING,
SWEETHEART?

I'M FINE,
NO BAD DREAMS
OR ANYTHING.



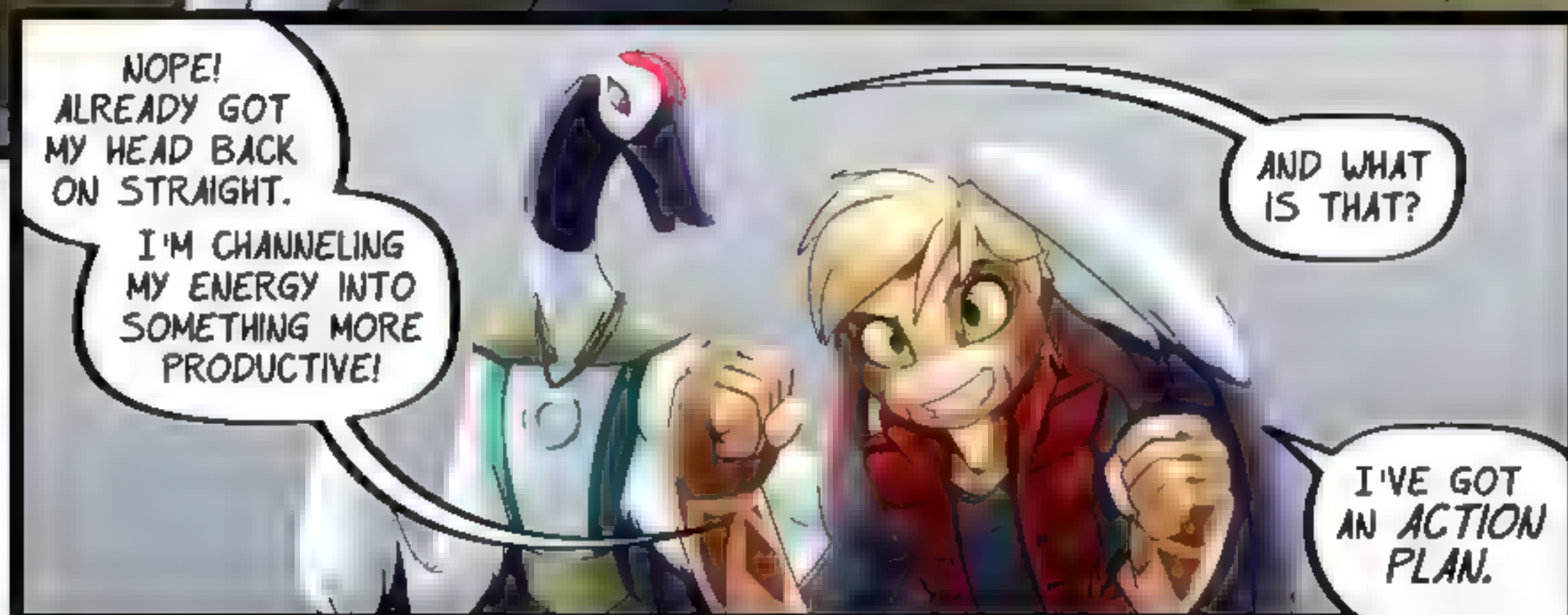
FOR REAL
THOUGH-- IF I CUT
THIS TOO CLOSE, DAD'LL
BE SWAMPED IN WORK
BY THE TIME I GET
THERE. CAN I GO?

STILL HAVING
TO **SCHEDULE**
TALKS WITH YOUR
FATHER, I SEE.

YEAH, BUT THIS
TIME HE CLEARED AN
HOUR FOR ME. I THINK
LAST NIGHT KINDA
GOT TO HIM.

HE'S LUCKY
YOU'RE TAKING THIS
ALL IN STRIDE, OR I'D
HAVE TO GO KICK DOWN
HIS DOOR AND ORDER
HIM TO MAKE TIME
FOR YOU.

...YOU ARE
CERTAIN YOU'RE
DOING ALRIGHT?
NOTHING MORE TO
SAY ABOUT WHAT
HAPPENED?



NOPE!
ALREADY GOT
MY HEAD BACK
ON STRAIGHT.

I'M CHANNELING
MY ENERGY INTO
SOMETHING MORE
PRODUCTIVE!

AND WHAT
IS THAT?

I'VE GOT
AN **ACTION**
PLAN.



OKAY
SO HEAR
ME OUT.

RIGHT NOW
I'M TAKING TWO
ELECTIVE CLASSES I
DON'T ACTUALLY NEED,
'CAUSE I'VE ALREADY
GOT ENOUGH CREDITS
TO GRADUATE.

**SURVEY OF
RHONUM LITERATURE**
AT 11:30 AM, AND
**INTERMEDIATE
ASTRONOMY**
AT 1 PM.

I CAN DROP
THEM, SWITCH TO AN
INDEPENDENT STUDY BLOCK
FROM 11:30 TO 2 PM, AND
GET AN INTERNSHIP WITH
THE SECURITY TEAM.

Z CAN ALWAYS
USE ANOTHER
FETCH-MINION!

HE PROBABLY
WON'T LET ME IN ON
HIS INVESTIGATION, BUT
I'LL HAVE AN EASIER TIME
GETTING **SOME** INFO ON WHAT'S
HAPPENING IF I'M THAT
CLOSE TO THE TEAM.

BUT APPLYING
FOR A SECURITY
INTERNSHIP TAKES
TIME, RIGHT?
AND I DON'T
HAVE TIME.

WHAT I **DO**
HAVE IS A DAD
WHO'S Z'S BOSS!
HOORAY FOR
NEPOTISM.

IF I CAN
GET DAD ON
MY SIDE, HE
CAN GET ME IN
THERE A.S.A.P.

BUT THAT'S
WHY I GOTTA GET
TO HIS OFFICE
BEFORE HE'S
TOO BUSY.

THAT'S QUITE A
BIT MORE FLESHED-
OUT THAN YOUR
USUAL IDEAS. I'M
IMPRESSED.

THANKS!
SO... CAN
I GO?

SOON, LOVE.
I JUST HAVE ONE
SUGGESTION--



STAY FLEXIBLE.

FLEXIBLE HOW?

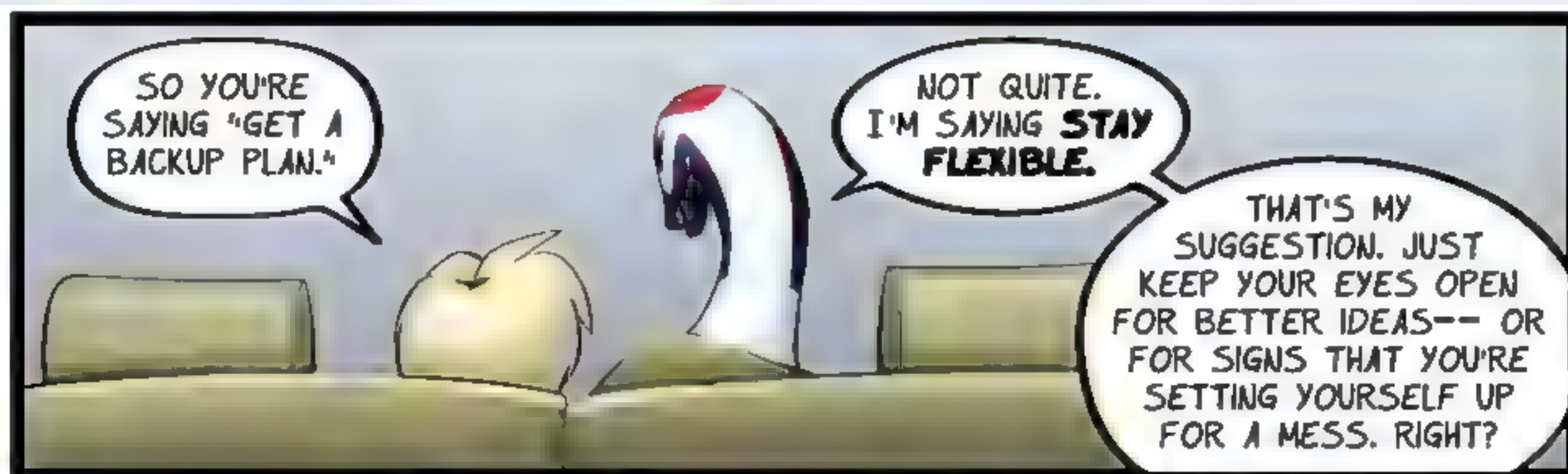
LET ME EXPLAIN.

I LIKE YOUR IDEA BECAUSE IT LETS YOU BE PROACTIVE, **AND** IT LETS CHIEF ZHRENOKOG KEEP YOU SAFE IN THE PROCESS.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S THE ONLY POSSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION, DOES IT?

YOU'VE MENTIONED BEFORE THAT YOUR FATHER SHOOTS DOWN EVERYTHING YOU TRY TO DO FOR HIM, YES? I'M SAYING THAT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT AGREE TO THIS PLAN, IT IS **NOT** THE END OF THE WORLD.

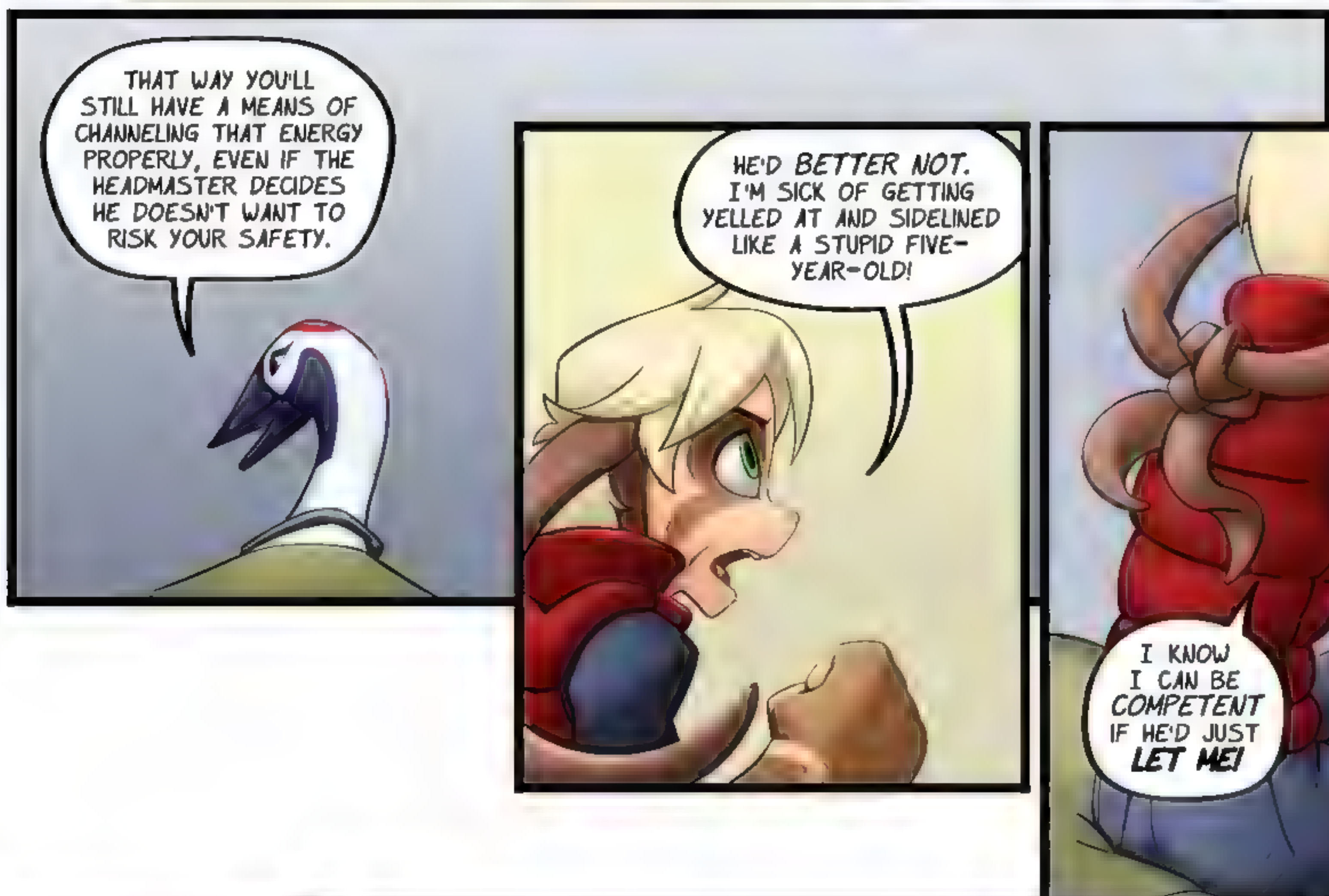
THERE ARE ALWAYS OTHER OPTIONS IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY.



SO YOU'RE SAYING "GET A BACKUP PLAN."

NOT QUITE. I'M SAYING **STAY FLEXIBLE**.

THAT'S MY SUGGESTION. JUST KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR BETTER IDEAS-- OR FOR SIGNS THAT YOU'RE SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR A MESS. RIGHT?



THAT WAY YOU'LL STILL HAVE A MEANS OF CHANNELING THAT ENERGY PROPERLY, EVEN IF THE HEADMASTER DECIDES HE DOESN'T WANT TO RISK YOUR SAFETY.

HE'D BETTER NOT. I'M SICK OF GETTING YELLED AT AND SIDELINED LIKE A STUPID FIVE-YEAR-OLD!

I KNOW I CAN BE **COMPETENT** IF HE'D JUST **LET ME!**



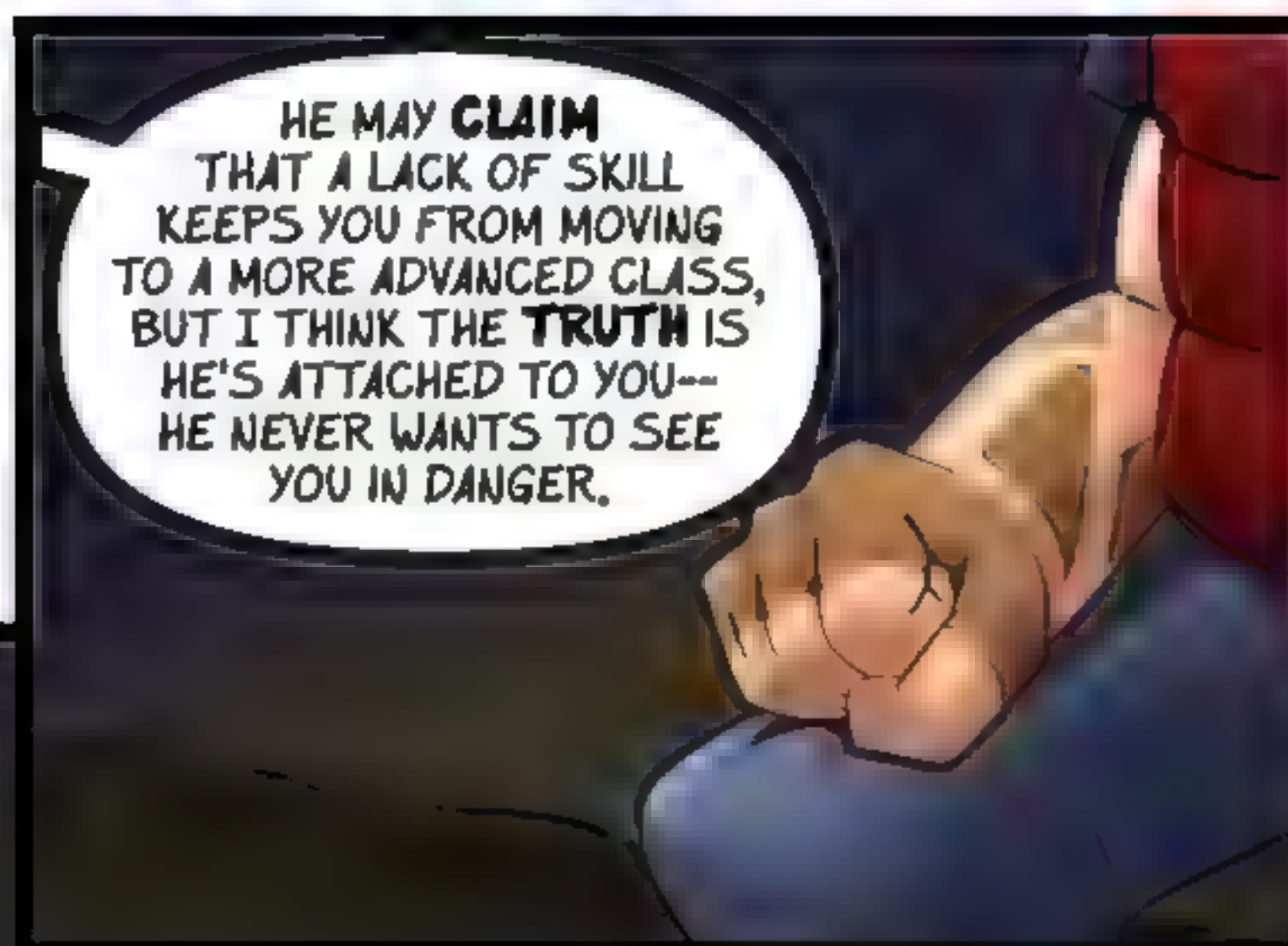
OF COURSE
YOU CAN.

YOU'VE PROVEN
REPEATEDLY THAT
YOU'RE ONE OF OUR
MOST GIFTED STUDENTS,
AND YOU'VE WORKED
HARD TO MAKE
IT SO.



AND YOUR
FATHER SEES
THIS AS WELL
AS I DO.

I SPEAK
TO HIM OFTEN.
HE SEES HOW FAR
YOUR POTENTIAL
MAY TAKE YOU.

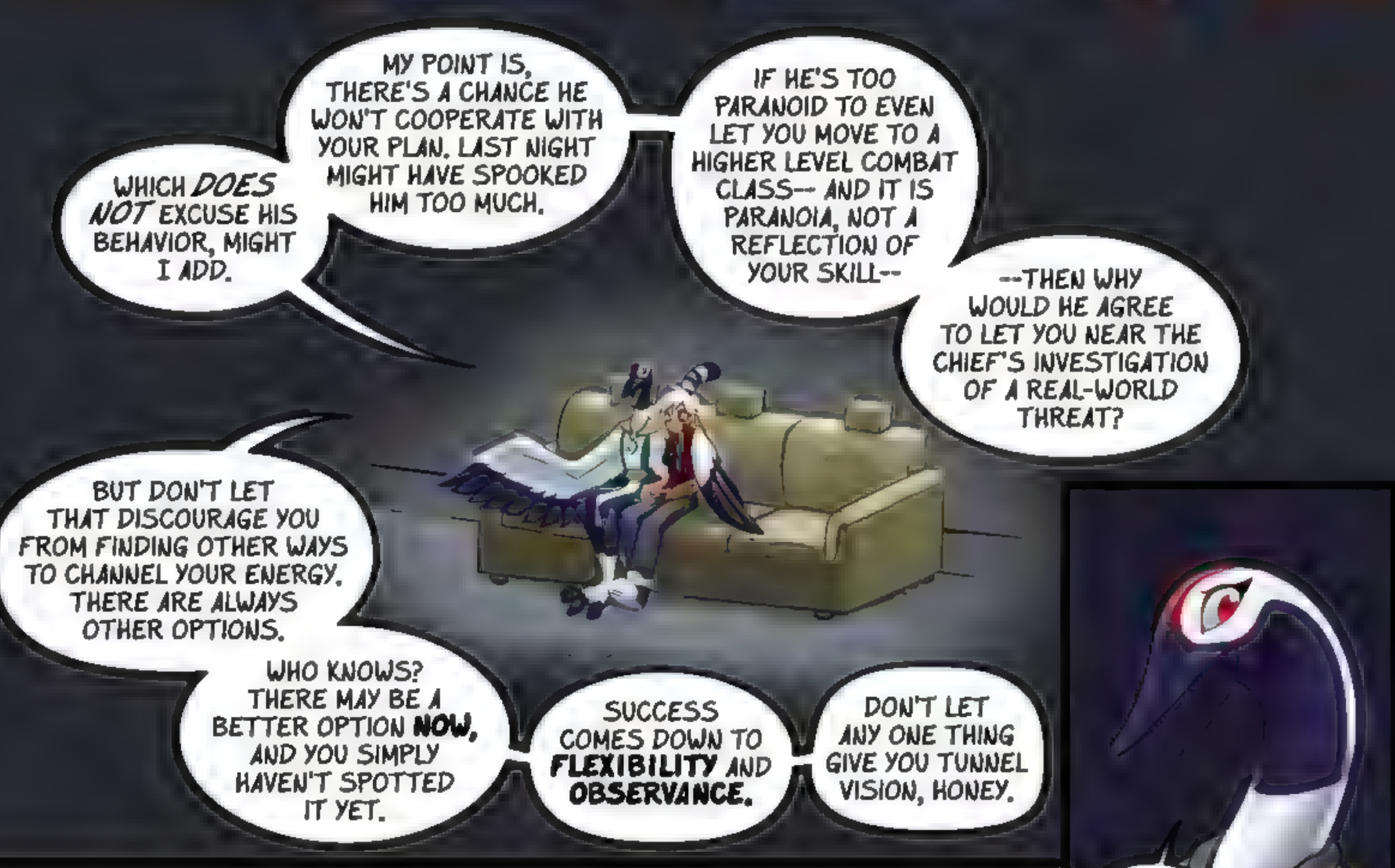


HE MAY **CLAIM**
THAT A LACK OF SKILL
KEEPS YOU FROM MOVING
TO A MORE ADVANCED CLASS,
BUT I THINK THE **TRUTH** IS
HE'S ATTACHED TO YOU--
HE NEVER WANTS TO SEE
YOU IN DANGER.



I KNOW THIS
IS AN UNWELCOME
OBSTACLE TO YOUR
GOALS, BUT THAT'S
THE REALITY YOU
HAVE TO WORK
WITH HERE:

YOUR FATHER
LOVES YOU, AND
WANTS TO KEEP
YOU SAFE.



WHICH **DOES**
NOT EXCUSE HIS
BEHAVIOR, MIGHT
I ADD.

MY POINT IS,
THERE'S A CHANCE HE
WON'T COOPERATE WITH
YOUR PLAN. LAST NIGHT
MIGHT HAVE SPOOKED
HIM TOO MUCH.

IF HE'S TOO
PARANOID TO EVEN
LET YOU MOVE TO A
HIGHER LEVEL COMBAT
CLASS-- AND IT IS
PARANOIA, NOT A
REFLECTION OF
YOUR SKILL--

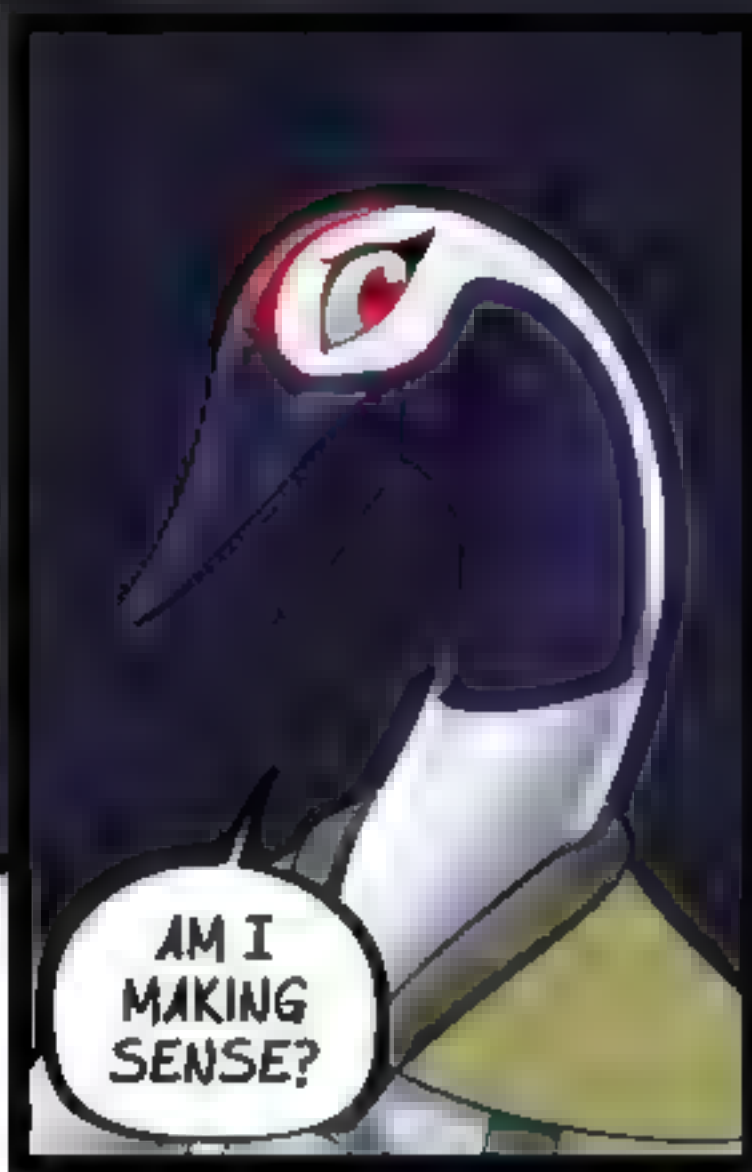
--THEN WHY
WOULD HE AGREE
TO LET YOU NEAR THE
CHIEF'S INVESTIGATION
OF A REAL-WORLD
THREAT?

BUT DON'T LET
THAT DISCOURAGE YOU
FROM FINDING OTHER WAYS
TO CHANNEL YOUR ENERGY.
THERE ARE ALWAYS
OTHER OPTIONS.

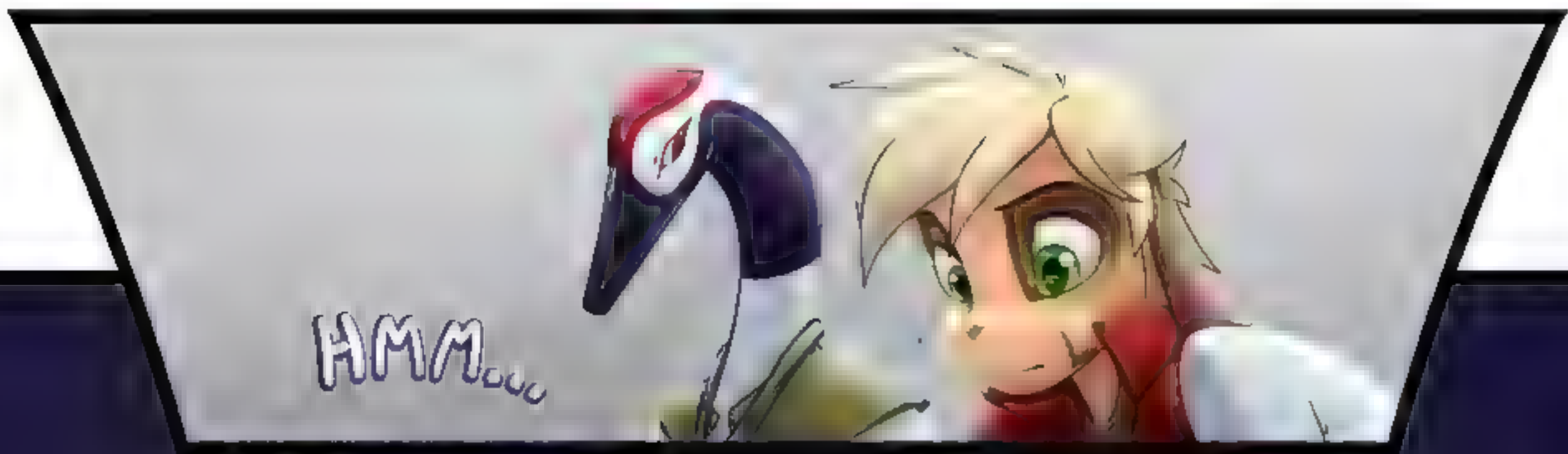
WHO KNOWS?
THERE MAY BE A
BETTER OPTION **NOW**,
AND YOU SIMPLY
HAVEN'T SPOTTED
IT YET.

SUCCESS
COMES DOWN TO
FLEXIBILITY AND
OBSERVANCE.

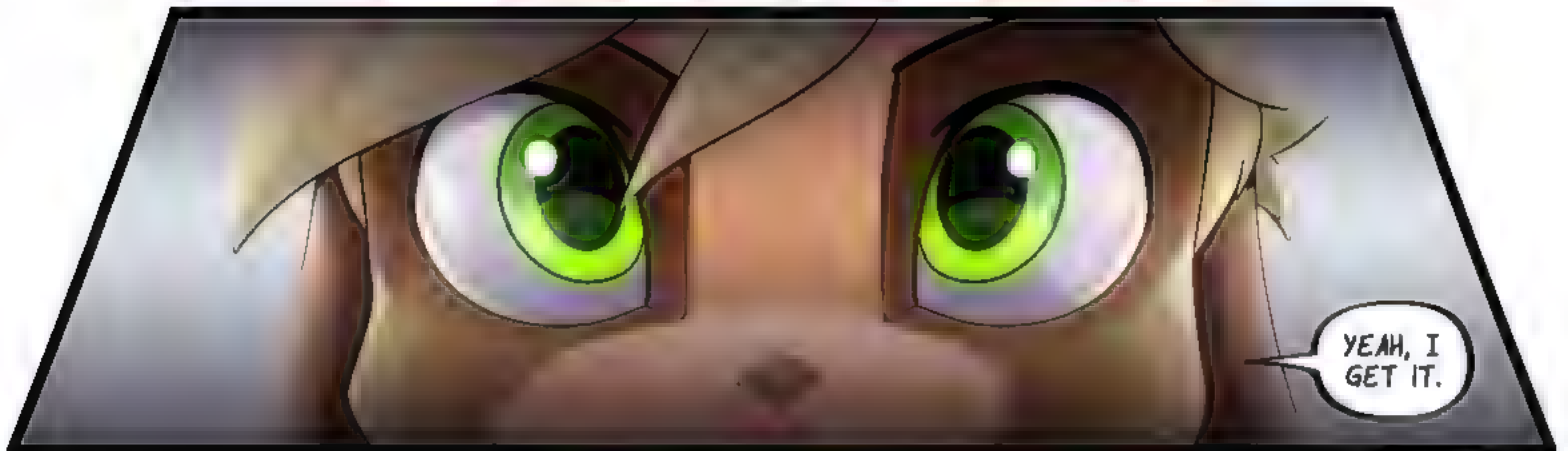
DON'T LET
ANY ONE THING
GIVE YOU TUNNEL
VISION, HONEY.



AM I
MAKING
SENSE?



HMM...



YEAH, I
GET IT.



I USUALLY HAVE A PRETTY GOOD GRIP ON WHETHER OR NOT MY PLANS ARE GONNA FAIL.

BUUUUUUT I DO KINDA GET ATTACHED TO THEM, 'CAUSE EVENTUALLY I'VE SUNK TOO MUCH EFFORT INTO 'EM TO LET IT GO.



SO WHEN I HIT AN OBSTACLE I CAN'T MUSCLE THROUGH, I STOP PROBLEM-SOLVING AND STEW IN THE FACT THAT IT FAILED AFTER ALL.

AT LEAST UNTIL A NEW IDEA HAPPENS.

IT'S A CYCLE.



SO BASICALLY, IF I SKIP THE PART WHERE I OBSESS OVER AN IDEA AND RUN IT INTO THE GROUND, IT **ALSO** SKIPS THE PART WHERE I WASTE X-AMOUNT OF TIME IN A PITY PARTY.

INSTEAD, IT CUTS STRAIGHT TO THE "GET BACK TO WORK" PART.

RIGHT?

EXACTLY.

AND THIS GIVES YOU FEWER CHANCES TO BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF.

MY HOPE IS THAT SOMEDAY, YOU WON'T NEED YOUR FATHER'S PRAISE TO SHOW YOU WHAT YOU'RE TRULY WORTH.

...BUT IN THE MEANTIME, YOU'RE CLEAR TO GO SQUEEZE IN A MEETING WITH HIM.



SWEET!

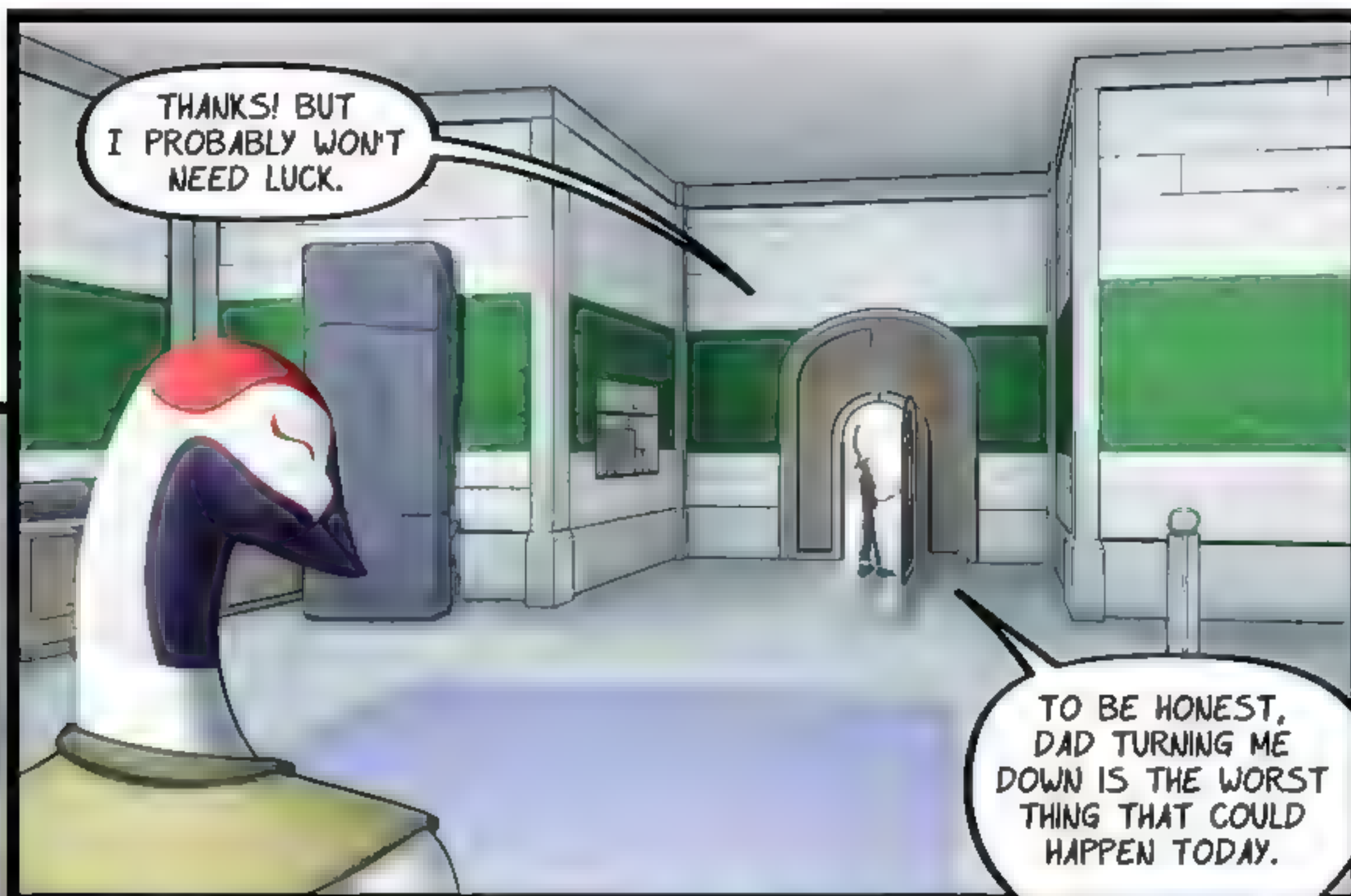
THANKS FOR THE ADVICE, MS. TANNI!

YOU'RE **AWESOME.**

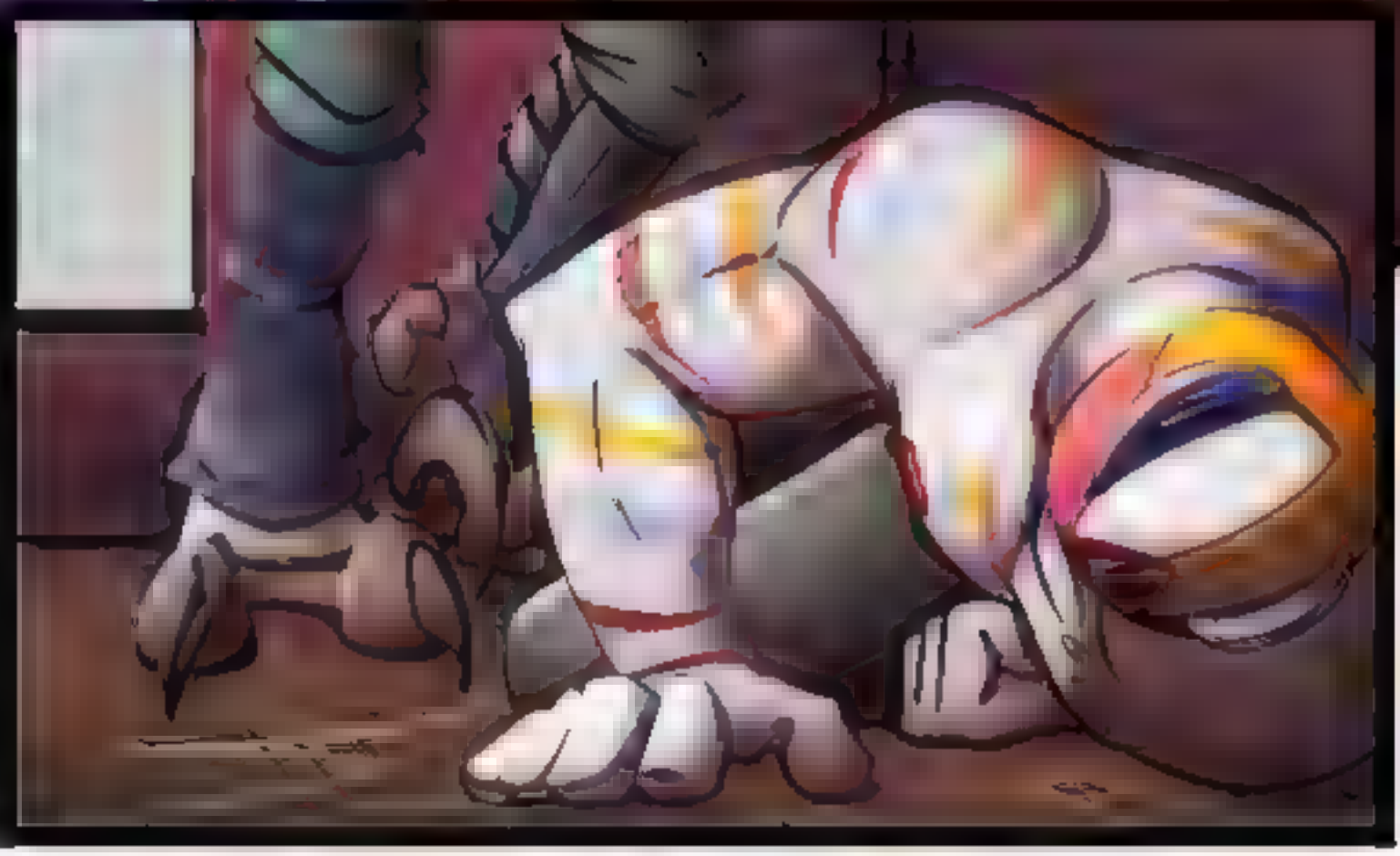
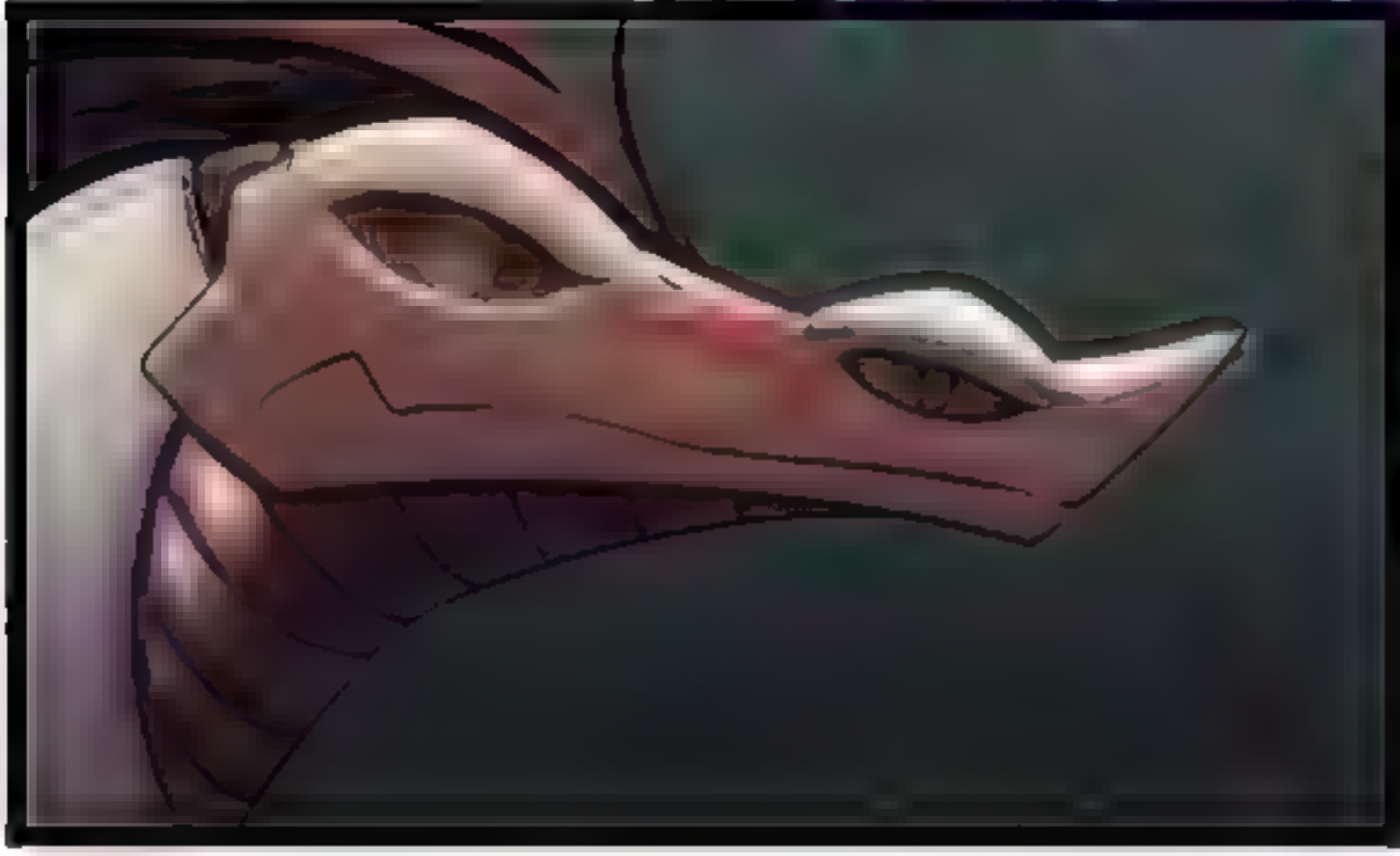


AS ARE YOU, SWEETHEART.

GOOD LUCK.









WHAT DID YOU FIND?

MORE OF THE SAME STUFF.

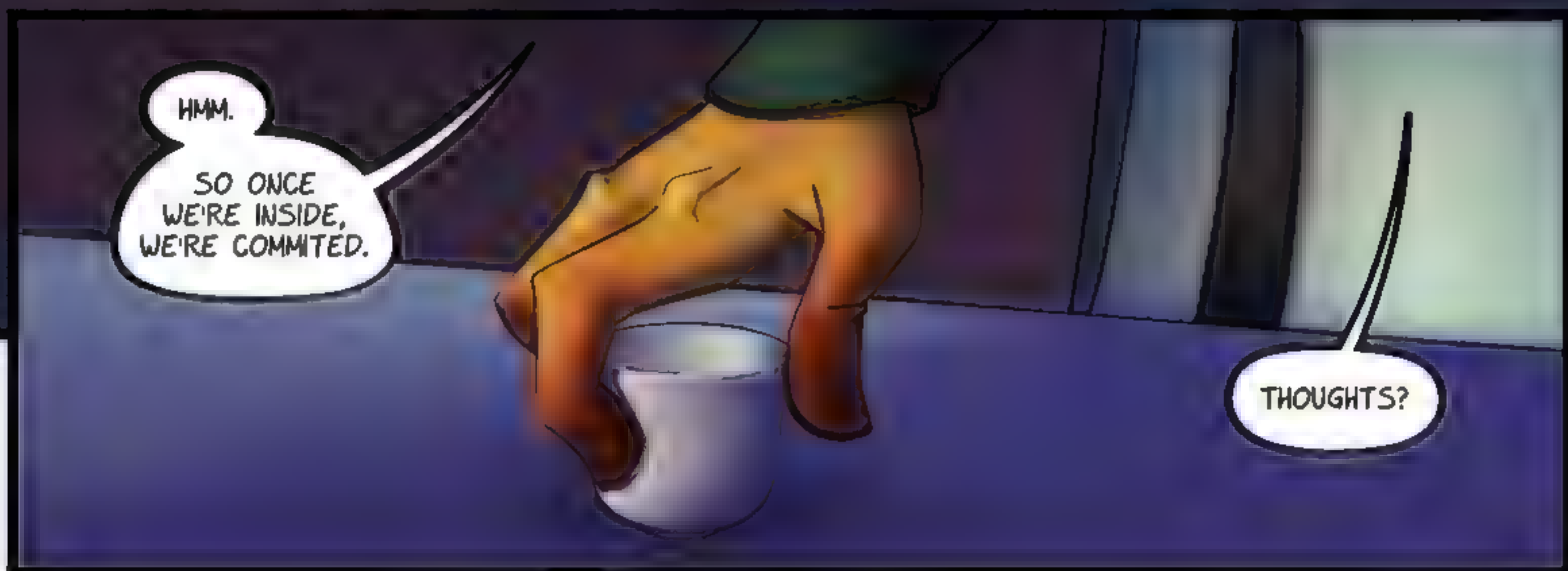
FINISHED TRACKING THEIR SCOUTING PARTIES ALONG THE REST OF THEIR PATROL ROUTES.

THEIR RANGE IS A LOT WIDER THAN EXPECTED.

DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT, BOSS. THEY DOUBLE BACK JUST BEYOND THIS ROCK FORMATION.

THAT'S NOT ENOUGH TIME TO SLIP IN UNNOTICED.

HOW MUCH WIDER? CAN WE GET ANY CLOSER WITHOUT GIVING AWAY OUR POSITION?



HMM.

SO ONCE WE'RE INSIDE, WE'RE COMMITTED.

THOUGHTS?



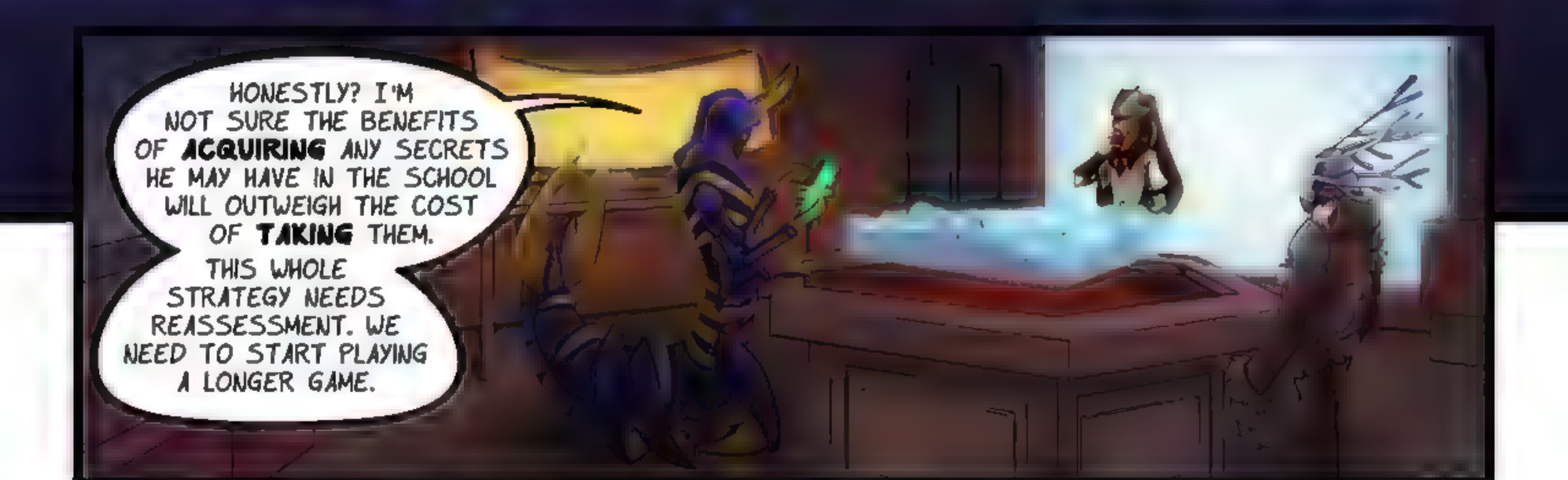
LOOK,
I'LL BE
FRANK.

OUR CHANCES
OF A QUICK AND
EASY TAKEOVER DIED
WHEN YOUR INFILTRATOR
BOTCHED HER MISSION
AND GOT CAUGHT.

EVEN IF NAZURET'S
SCOUTS HAVEN'T SPOTTED
US YET, THEY **KNOW** WE'RE
HERE, AND IT'S A MATTER
OF TIME BEFORE THEY
TRACK US DOWN.

SO NOW, OUR
ONLY AVAILABLE
OPTION IS TO WHIP
OUR FORCES ON A
TEN HOUR ROAD
TRIP, RIGHT INTO A
CONFRONTATION
WITH A **LUNATIC**
ON HIS OWN
HOME TURF--

AND ON TOP
OF THAT, WE HAVE
NO IDEA WHAT HE
MIGHT BE HIDING
UP HIS SLEEVE.



HONESTLY? I'M
NOT SURE THE BENEFITS
OF **ACQUIRING** ANY SECRETS
HE MAY HAVE IN THE SCHOOL
WILL OUTWEIGH THE COST
OF **TAKING** THEM.

THIS WHOLE
STRATEGY NEEDS
REASSESSMENT. WE
NEED TO START PLAYING
A LONGER GAME.



HMM.

GOOD POINTS,
ALL WORTHY OF
CONSIDERATION.

AND YOU,
MY FRIEND?
AGREE OR
DISAGREE?



WE'D BE
STUPID NOT
TO HIT 'EM
AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE.

WHY?

THIS IS
NAZURET KRAON
WE'RE DEALING
WITH-- THERE'S NO
WAY HE SETTLED FOR
PLAIN OLD **SECURITY**
GUARDS TO KEEP US
OUT OF WHATEVER
HE'S GOT HERE.

OBSOLETELY.

BUT MY CY-OPS
SAY HIS SYSTEM
ONLY HAS THE NAMES
OF ABOUT THREE
HUNDRED GUARDS
ON FILE--

YEAH, 'CAUSE
MORE THAN THAT
WOULD LOOK FISHY.
SO WHAT? HE'S GOT
ENOUGH LAND TO HIDE
AN ARMY, AND HOW'S
THE GOVERNMENT
GOING TO KNOW?

AN ARMY WOULD
BE **VISIBLE** TO OUR
SCOUTS. THERE'S NO
SIGN OF ANY EXTRA
TROOPS ON SITE.

EVEN IF
THEY'RE THE
BIGGEST BADASSES
ON THE CONTINENT,
THREE HUNDRED
ISN'T ENOUGH.

I SAY WE
HIT 'EM HARD.
FORCE THOSE GUARDS
TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
PROTECTING THE **KIDS**
AND PROTECTING ANY
SECRET ASSETS HE'S
HIDING IN THERE.

AS LONG AS
THEY DON'T GET
OFF A DISTRESS CALL
BEFORE WE'RE INSIDE,
THEY WON'T STAND
A CHANCE.
BUT ONCE
THEY SEND AN
S.O.S....

ONCE THEY
CALL FOR HELP, OUR
WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY
WILL BE LIMITED.

AND SINCE
AGENT BACK DOOR
HASN'T REPORTED ANY
FINDS YET, AND KRAON
IS UNLIKELY TO LEAVE
HIS EXPERIMENTAL TOYS
JUST LYING AROUND,
WE'LL NEED TIME TO
DIG FOR THEM.

THERE MUST
BE A WAY TO
PRY THAT WINDOW
FURTHER OPEN...

HEY, ARE WE
PRETENDING YOUR
SCOUT DIDN'T PICK
UP A KID WITH
FREAKY POWERS
LAST NIGHT?

HOW DO WE
KNOW HIS FIGHTERS
AREN'T HIDING MORE
TRICKS LIKE THAT UP
THEIR SLEEVES?

IT'S UNLIKELY.
THE KID'S THE ONLY
ONE WE'VE SEEN WITH
THAT KIND OF ABILITY,
SO FOR ALL WE KNOW,
SHE MAY JUST HAVE A
WEIRD NEBU-KHEN.

IT'S NOT LIKE
OUR SCIENTISTS
UNDERSTAND THE
MECHANICS OF THEM
VERY WELL...

THAT'S MORE
RHONUM'S STRONG
SUIT, NOT OURS.

EVEN IF THE
MANIAC'S EXPERIMENTING
WITH ARTIFICIAL POWERS,
SHE'S MORE LIKELY TO BE
PART OF A LIMITED BATCH
OF GUINEA PIGS.

MAYBE EVEN
A UNIQUE EARLY
PROTOTYPE.

...PROTOTYPE.

YES.

THAT GIRL
MAY BE ONE OF
THE ASSETS WE'RE
HERE TO ACQUIRE.



TZAOSIN, A FIGHTER WHO **CANNOT BE DISARMED** ISN'T SOMETHING OUR TROOPS ARE EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH.

ONE KID WITH THAT KIND OF POWER IS BAD ENOUGH. AND IF NAZURET HAS MORE THAN ONE-- OR IF HE HAS **TRAINED UNITS**--

THEN WE TAKE THEM ALL. REST ASSURED, THEY WILL BE KEPT DOCILE IN CAPTIVITY. LEAVE THAT TO ME.

WHAT, WITH YOUR CREEPY BULLSHIT BRAIN-WASHING PROGRAM?

I DON'T RECALL YOU TELLING US THAT OPERATION WAS VIABLE FOR MORE THAN **SHORT-TERM** USAGE.

I'VE SEEN THOSE CRATES OF WHATEVER SPECIALIZED FUEL YOU USE. HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE LEFT? CAN YOU ACTUALLY SUSTAIN THIS MUCH LONGER?

OF COURSE I CAN.

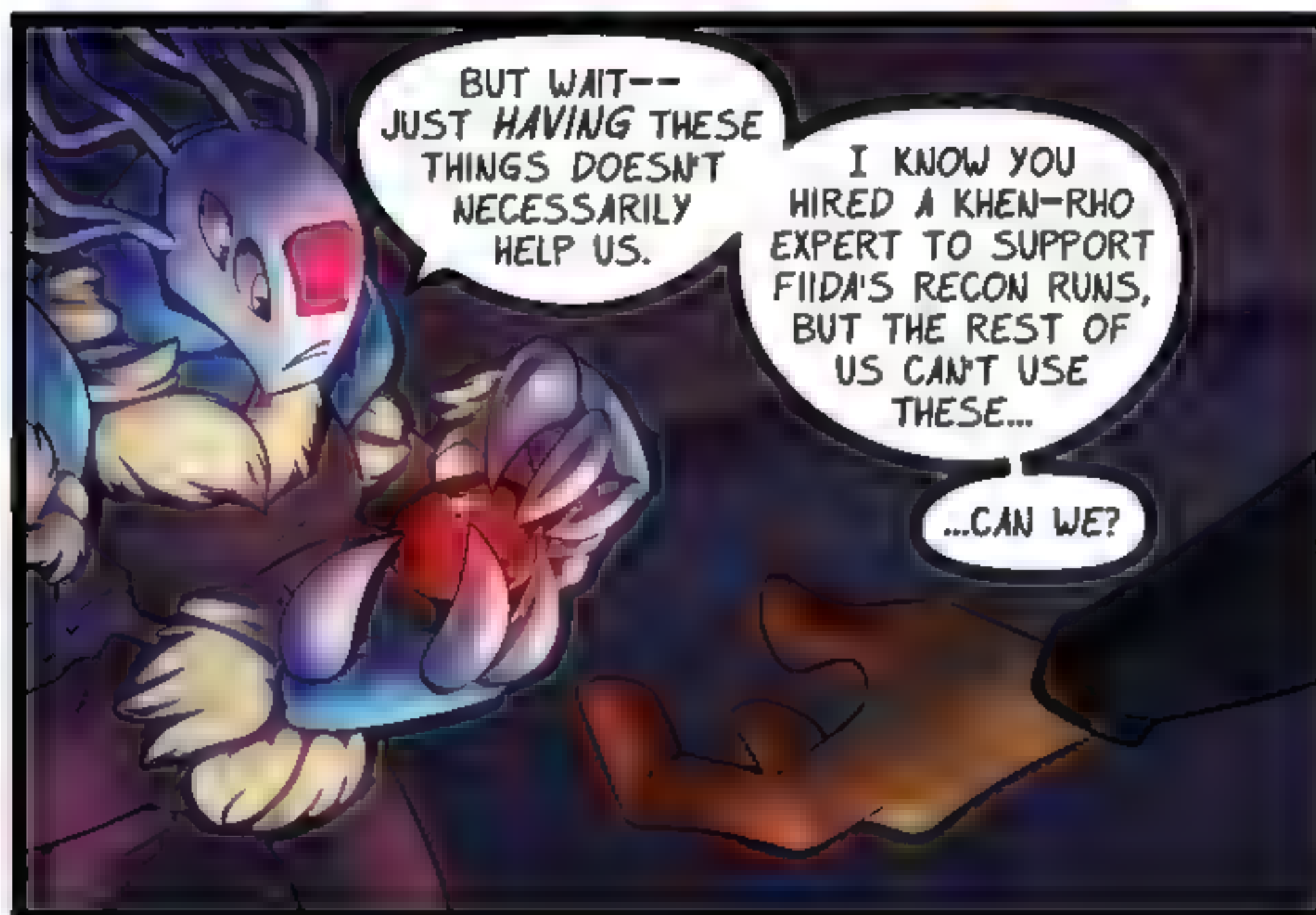
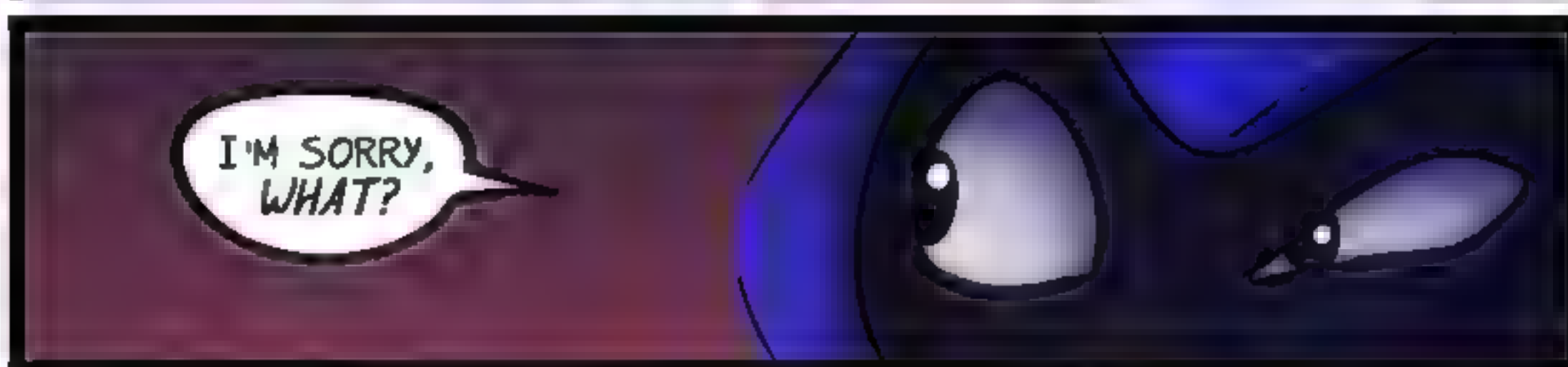
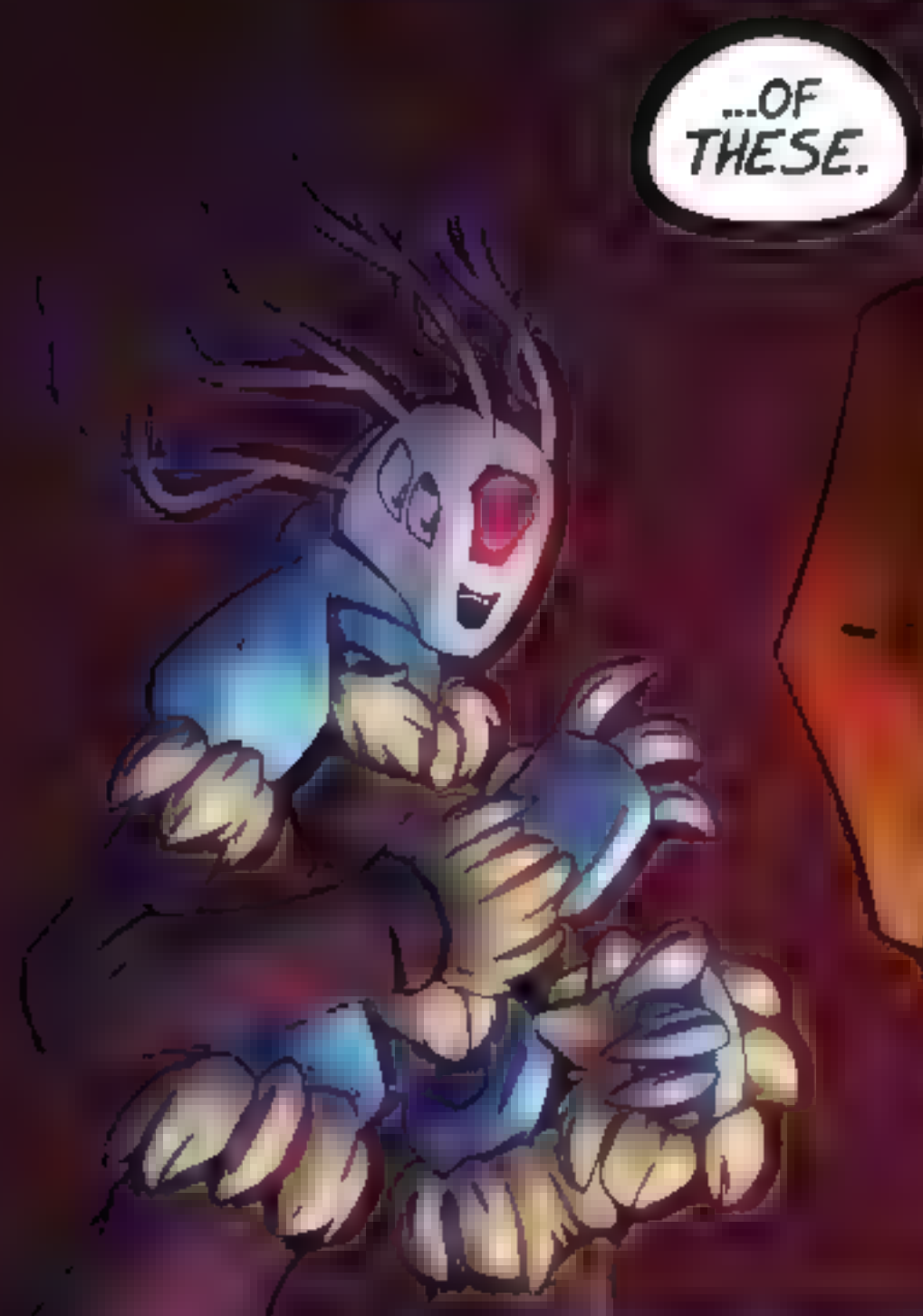
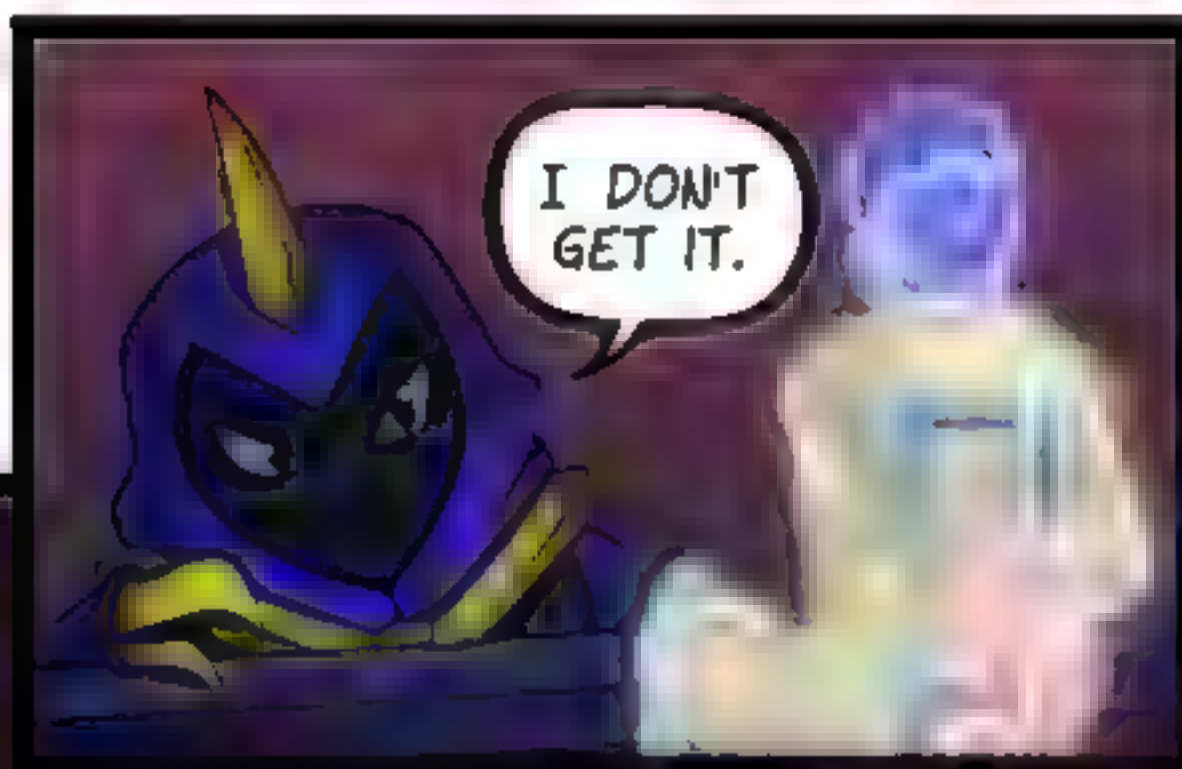
FIRST OF ALL: YOU'RE ASSUMING THAT MY "SPECIALIZED FUEL" IS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN.

SECONDLY: YOU ASSUME THAT IT IS **FINITE**.

HOWEVER, IF YOU'LL RECALL THE TRUCKLOAD OF PRISONERS MY MEN TOOK GREAT PAINS TO BRING WITH US ON THIS EXPEDITION...

I BELIEVE YOU'LL FIND A TIDY ANSWER TO ALL OF THOSE QUESTIONS.

!!







WELL, THAT IS CERTAINLY A TALL ORDER.

...IF ONE FAILS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FACT THAT I HAVE CARRIED THIS PROJECT **ALONE** FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW.

OR THAT I'VE BROKERED A FUNCTIONAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN ALL SEVEN OF KASTINA'S MOST NOTORIOUS WARRING CRIME RINGS.

OR THAT MY 'RECRUITERS' IN CITIES NATIONWIDE CONTINUE TO WORK AROUND THE CLOCK TO WIN THE HEARTS OF THE MASSES, RIGHT UNDER THE SENATE'S NOSE.

OR THAT MY PROPAGANDA MACHINE HAS ALREADY GAINED A STRANGLEHOLD ON OUR MAJOR NEWS NETWORKS, TO **EXPEDITE** THE WINNING OF HEARTS.

NOW, RECALL:

I'VE ALREADY COMPROMISED THE SCHOOL'S EMERGENCY LAND LINES. IF WE TAKE OUT THEIR WIRELESS SYSTEMS, THEY WILL BE ISOLATED.

I'VE ALSO MANAGED-- DESPITE ALL SKEPTICISM-- TO SNEAK A MOLE INTO THAT PARANOID MEGALOMANIAC'S RANKS. A MOLE WHO IS CURRENTLY PULLING STRINGS TO ARRANGE OUR VICTORY.

BARRING THESE CONDITIONS, I CAN SEE WHY ONE WOULD THINK THIS SITUATION IS NOT ENTIRELY UNDER MY CONTROL.

NO MATTER.

YOU WERE INVITED HERE AS A BUSINESS COURTESY, AND HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO LEAVE. IF YOU WISH.

HOWEVER...

I WOULD CONSIDER THE **PRIZE** BEFORE I WALK AWAY.



THIS WAS NEVER ABOUT STEALING SOME FOOL'S SCIENCE PROJECT AND SOME EXTRA GUNS.

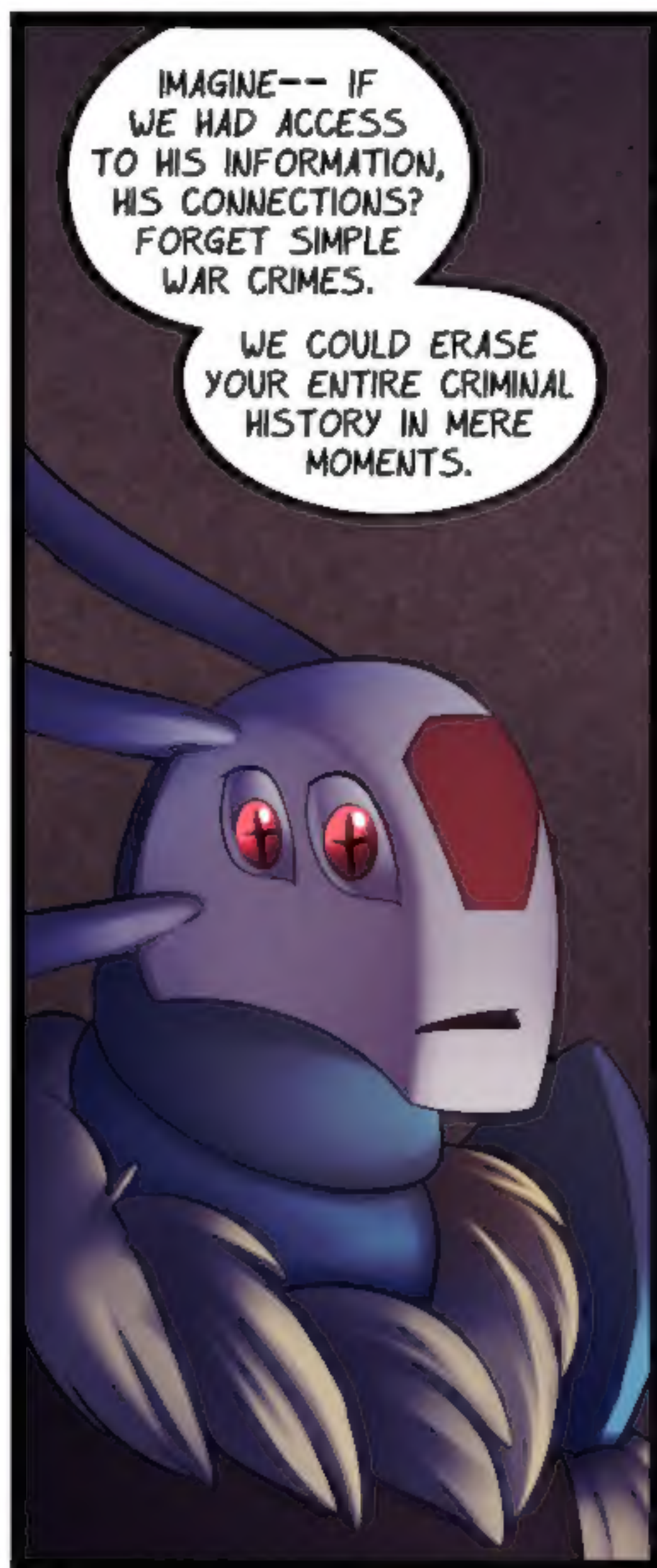
IT'S ABOUT GETTING OUR HANDS ON THE TOOLS TO RESHAPE ENTIRE NATIONS.

THIS IS THE LAIR OF NAZURET KRAON, REMEMBER? THE CORPORATE BARON WHO TRIMMED THE FORTY NATIONS OF THE RHONUM LEAGUE DOWN TO THIRTY-SEVEN.

THE MAN'S SHADOW NETWORK COULD START A WAR IN A WEEK, IF HE CHOSE.

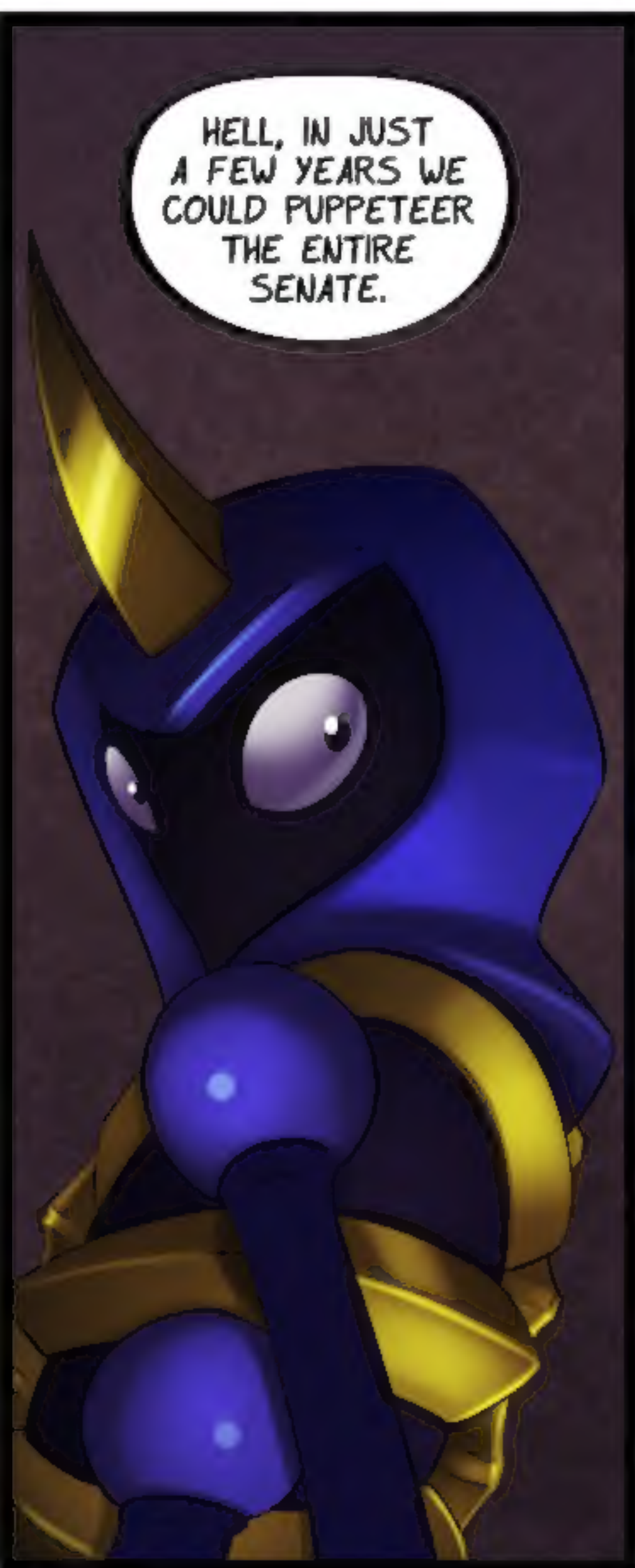
AND THAT'S WHAT WE'RE AFTER.

THE KEYS TO THAT SHADOW NETWORK.

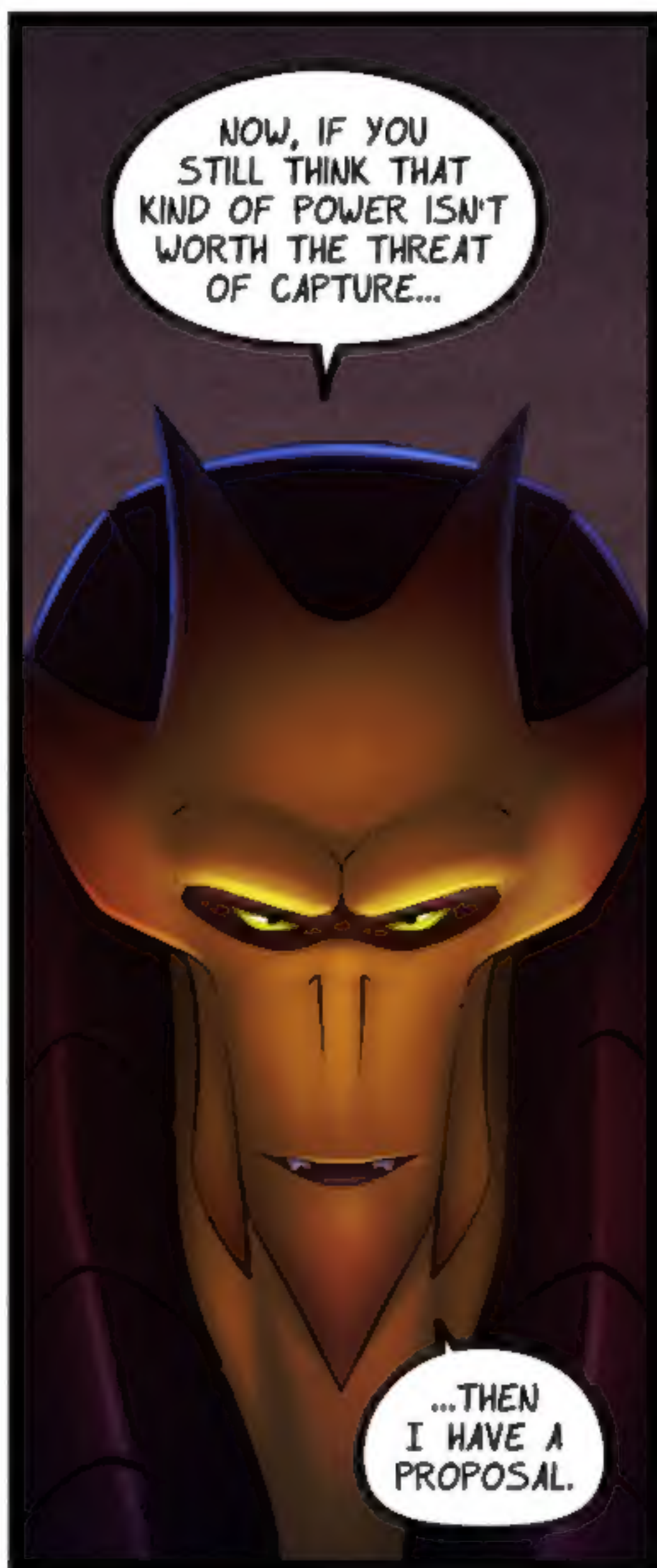


IMAGINE-- IF WE HAD ACCESS TO HIS INFORMATION, HIS CONNECTIONS? FORGET SIMPLE WAR CRIMES.

WE COULD ERASE YOUR ENTIRE CRIMINAL HISTORY IN MERE MOMENTS.



HELL, IN JUST A FEW YEARS WE COULD PUPPETEER THE ENTIRE SENATE.



NOW, IF YOU STILL THINK THAT KIND OF POWER ISN'T WORTH THE THREAT OF CAPTURE...

...THEN I HAVE A PROPOSAL.

